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Enemies of the System

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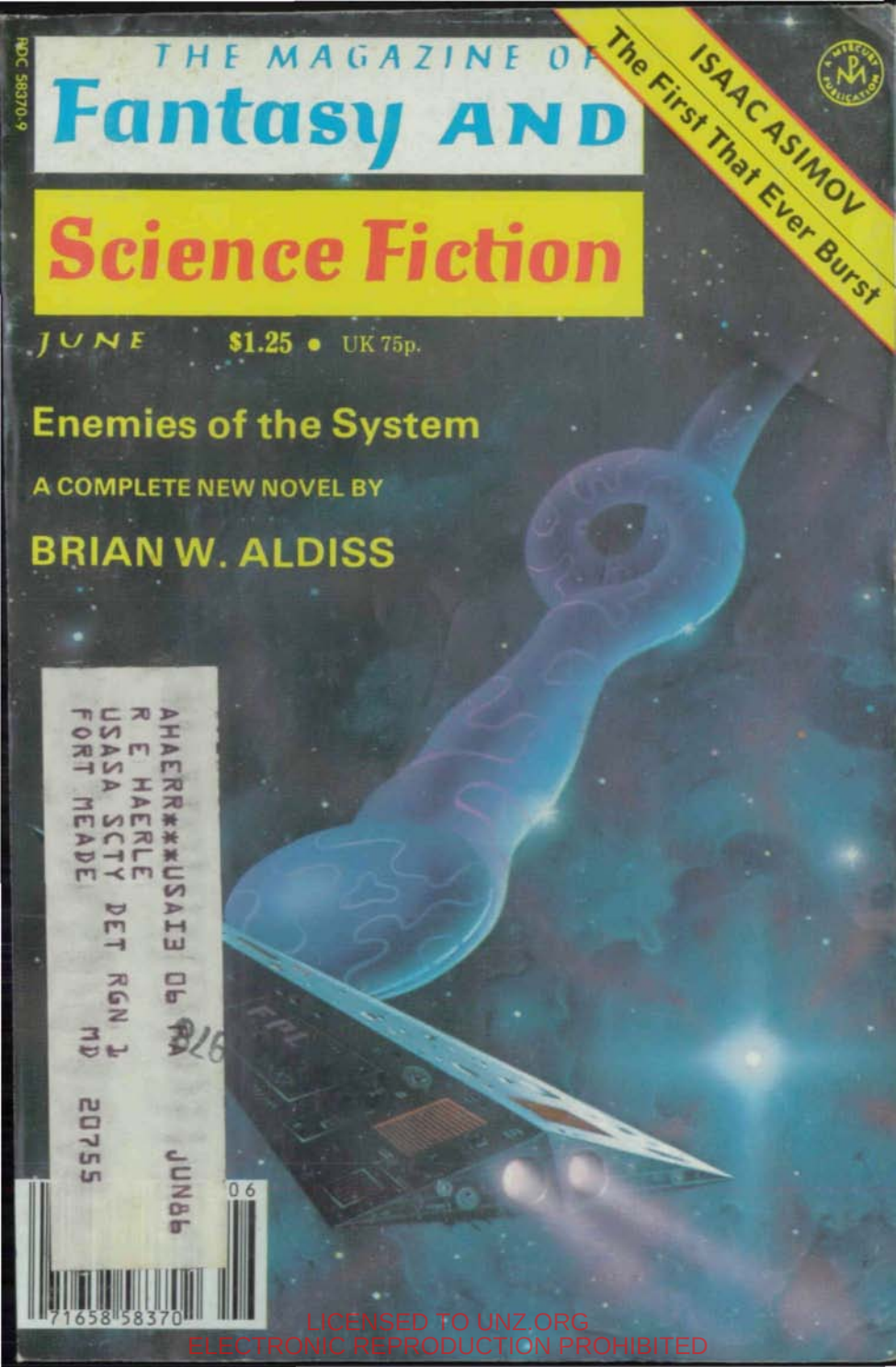

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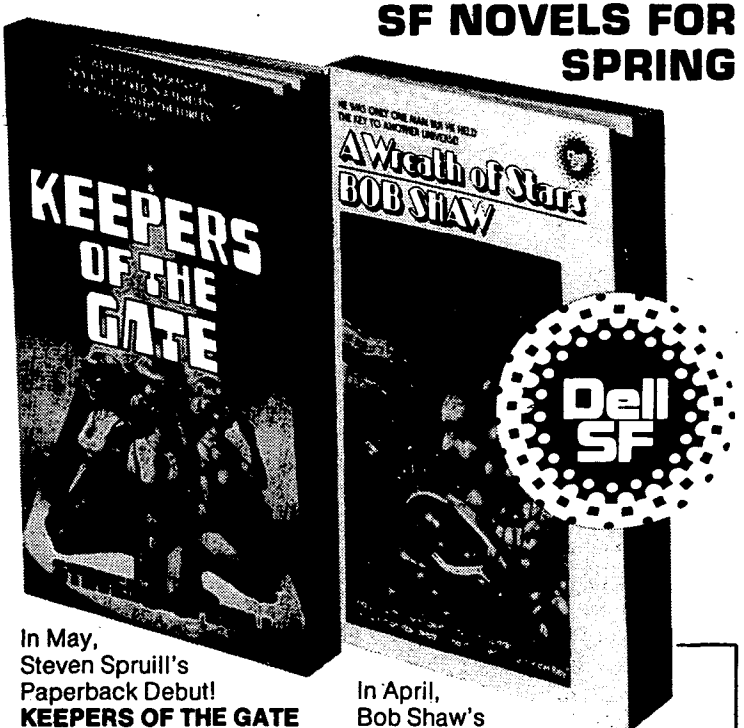

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Brian Aldiss has been a regular contributor to F&SF since the 1950's, with stories such as "Hothouse," "A Kind of Artistry," "The Saliva Tree," and, most recently, "Three Ways," in our April all-British issue. The major new novella below takes place in the far future, during the millionth anniversary of the creation of a totally rational Utopia, and concerns what happens when a party of these Utopianists is stranded on a primitive and savage planet. The story will be published shortly in book form by Harper & Row.

Enemies Of The System

by BRIAN W. ALDISS

I

Inspirational music played as they moved from the terminal buildings into the ferry.

Without fuss, without pushing, they settled into relaxers and waited for the ferry to depart. Fifty-two of them took their places, the sexes about equally balanced. Their clothes were so similar in cut and so subdued in color and material, as to resemble a uniform; their hair, whether male or female, was trimmed to approximately the same length; their faces were all bland, even blank. They sat without restlessness. They were the elite of the system, allowed to vacation on the Classified planet of Lysenka II.

The ferry rose silently, dead on time. World Peace City, the Earth itself, shrank behind them. They watched the planet dwindle, then turned and smiled circumspectly at each other. They were strangers and nobody knew who was who; even among the elite there were many power grades.

From the ferry, the passengers transferred to a gulfhopper awaiting them in a parking orbit around the Moon. As soon as the ferry dropped away, the gulfhopper established a charm-field and began its expensive cratobatics. Earth disappeared like an eyeball dropping down a drain; the sun was transformed into an icicle of light and vanished. Time became a series of equations.

Oblivious to alarm, the tourists could now settle down and become acquainted with one another. The distance from the Solar System to the Lysenka System was 50.2 light years in Ordinary Space terms, so passengers had forty hours on the transference from system to system in which to indulge in social intercourse or related activities.

The gulfhopper was a spacious

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craft, well-provided with lounges, restaurants, viewer-chambers, an aquatics suite, and private rooms. Hostesses in blue Gulfways uniforms assisted some passengers to meet the partners that Extra-System selectors had chosen for them, if they had not had time to meet before embarking at World Peace City.

One of the smiling hostesses introduced two tall people, a man and a woman, who briefly touched fingertips and then stood regarding each other. Nodding, the hostess left them to themselves.

"My name is Jerezy Kordan, World Citizen 692," the male said, smiling to soften the familiarity of using only his last three numbers on first meeting. "I am pleased that we are to be associated for this vacation."

The female smiled back and was just as informal. "I'm World Citizen 194, Millia Sygiek. And I'm pleased that the selector picked you, Utopianist Kordan, since I know that we are going to be compatible."

Kordan had a long serious face with thick lips which were generally pursed and long grey eyes. He stood squarely before her, his hands hanging relaxedly by his sides.

Sygiek was almost as tall as he, a woman with light brown hair and grey eyes. Her jaw was firm, her expression a little severe until she smiled. She folded her hands and held them at waist level as they talked.

"We could be nothing but compatible since the computer graded us for compatibility. Compatitility is a quality we both rate as desirable."

"Inevitably. Pleasure is stipulated as one of the factors of our vacation, and so compatibility is part of the guarantee. Don't you find compatibility a positive quality, a constructive quality?"

"I was meaning only to imply that some Progressives regard the male-female relationship as a little old-fashioned, even irrelevant to the needs of the system."

He gestured slightly with his hands. "We tolerate Progressives in our world society." He spoke without any particular emphasis. "But of course they form only approximately one point four five per cent of the population." He took her arm as if dismissing that subject.

They were on their way toward their private room when a tenor voice said softly over the artificial pulse-beats, "Remember that sexual intercourse is an approved social usage. It is pleasureable. Inevitably, it increases the physical and mental well-being of both partners, thus enhancing their value to the system. Associate with your partner as much as possible on the journey. Happy lying!"

Sygiek smiled. "You see, like good Utopianists, our wishes run ahead of the official reminder."

But as they passed through one of the relaxation halls, they were distracted for a moment. A row of chessputers sat before a row of three-dimensional chess boards, waiting to play against any human who cared to challenge them. Each chessputer was smaller than a person's head; its single arm, of a fleshlike substance, folded down into its side when it was out of action. Someone had pushed two of the machines together and they were playing the

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complex game against each other.

As one game was won, the machines solemnly reset the pieces and moved straight into the next. Several tourists were watching.

Peering over the shoulder of one of the onlookers, Kordan said, "That's amusing! You see they exert their capacities merely to win against each other."

The man in front of him — a stocky dark-featured man of less than average height — looked around and said, "It would be more amusing if one of them showed a little glee at winning."

When they were settled in their comfortable room, Kordan said, "What could that man have meant, that it would have been more amusing if the machines showed a little pleasure at winning? How can a machine be expected to show pleasure?"

"'Glee.' He said 'glee'."

She began to undress.

He was following his own train of thought. "One does inevitably experience some pleasure in winning, yet 'Our strength lies in our unity.' A valuable adage. Winning implies competition, whilst unity implies no competition. It is a slight paradox. Since we are privileged to vacation on Lysenka II, we are among the winners of the system. May I express it like that?" Kordan paused, waiting for her response.

"There is always privilege involved in visiting an extra-solar planet. In the case of Lysenka II, I gather that it has been opened to tourism before complete conformity with cultural standards has been attained, simply in order to join in the anniversary celebrations."

"It is true that the animal life has not been subdued, as it will inevitably have to be." His lips twitched. "For me as an historian, with special interest in the pre-Utopian world, I welcome a chance to see something of a planet where the animal societies, as I understand, approximate what life used to be on Earth before Biocom."

Sygiek removed her stockings as he began to slip out of his one-piece tunic. "My business is entirely with the present. I have no interest in the pre-Utopian world, not even in this anniversary year." She spoke briskly.

He smiled by pursing his lips. "Perhaps Lysenka II will awaken new interests. Undoubtedly, we shall see sights incompatible with civilization. So, until then, let us refresh ourselves with some compatibility. Kindly move over and open your legs."

She smiled and relaxed against the voluptuous cushions, readying herself for him like a mare for her rider. Unbidden, a picture of the man by the chessputers came to her mind.

"Let's have a little *glee*," she said.

All too soon, the beautiful expensive structure had crossed that gulf of light which even the world state would never subjugate. It materialized in orbit about Lysenka II, while almost sub-vocal commentaries uttered facts about the sun, Lysenka, and its four attendant planets; three of them swirling globes of gas, and only II a world remotely suitable for the establishment of law and enlightenment.

In the ferry on the way down to Peace City, the one base so far constructed on Lysenka II, the comment-

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aries welcomed their guests.

"We hope that you will be happy during your stay on Lysenka II, and your intellects fully engaged. Although this planet has been known to the world state for many centuries, it is only just being opened up for tourism. You may regard yourself as especially privileged to be here. For those of us who work on Lysenka II, it is an honor to greet you, knowing as we do that you are part of the special System-wide celebrations of the one millionth anniversary of the establishment of Biocom. The universal beneficial aspects of Biocom will never be more appreciated than on this planet, where everything is primitive, regressive, and of an entirely lower politico-evolutionary order.

"So we trust that you will enjoy your stay and be strengthened by it for further dedication to our beloved system. Welcome to Lysenka II."

The passengers looked at each other. Some smiled guardedly.

Everyone was given booster and acupunctural shots to acclimatize them to the planet before they settled on alien soil. Down swooped the ferry. A moment of silence more dreadful than any gulf of light, and then great exit doors swung open. They opened too rapidly: the sky was a bright tan ceiling of cloud, enclosing the visitors on the new world. They blinked, unaccountably reluctant to move forward.

Hostesses, in red Outourist uniform instead of Gulfways blue, ushered the tourists into LDBs, smiling and reassuring them. As soon as a long-distance bus was full, it began to accelerate down one of the radial roads leading from Peace City into the wilderness.

The passengers took deep breaths and looked at each other, as if the new environment forced them to take fresh measure of themselves. In the unaccustomed light, the set of their faces was strange.

The bus arrived at Dunderzee in under an E-hour. Dunderzee was Lysenka's newly opened tourist resort. It stood on the edge of territory no human had explored from the ground.

Still reassuringly chaperoned, the tourists were conducted to their rooms in the Unity Hotel. The hotel was sumptuous but not entirely finished. Besides a spectacular view of the broken. tawny country outside, every room boasted a living wall which showed a close-up of Dunderzee Lake. As Kordan and Sygiek entered their room, they felt compelled to stand before the wall and gaze at the waterfall that fed the lake. With slow thunder, the water dropped free for almost one thousand meters down the carmine sides of Dunderzee Gorge. Cumbersome birds glided down the face of the gorge, dipping into the column of white water, flashing in the spray.

Turning away to place his kit on a shelf, Kordan said, "Though I have traveled most of the System, and twice visited the Argyre Ocean since they released the waters, Dunderzee Gorge impresses me. We shall enjoy visiting the reality."

She was surprised that he spoke so subjectively, and said nothing, standing to watch a pack of manlike creatures which swam strongly in the foam of the lake.

"Millia, tell me more about yourself," Kordan said.

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"You can judge me for yourself." She met his eyes. Both were silent, contemplating each other.

"Where were you born? On Earth?" he inquired.

"I was born in a township on the Ust'-Urt Plateau, two hundred and fifty kilometers from the Aral Sea." She indicatd the falling water, the troubled lake. "I never saw anything but flatness until I was twelve years old, so perhaps this great gorge strikes me as against nature. It's unsophisticated, I can see that."

"The day after tomorrow, you and I shall stand beside that waterfall in reality, Millia."

"Yes, that should be a worthwile cultural expedition. Also I wish to become more acquainted with our fellow tourists. They form an interesting cross-section of the middle echelons of our system society. You may escort me down to the bar, if you wish."

II

The Unity Hotel held some two thousand guests, all of them important in their own right back in the System. Jerezy Kordan was an historian specializing in the Classified period of pre-Utopian Europe before the introduction of Biocom. He was a full Academician of the IPUS, the Institute of Pre-Utopian Studies, and in time likely to rise to Chancellor. Millia Sygiek announced herself as a commutation supervisor with System Population Mobility. As such, it was her job to travel the planets and satellites of the System, seeing that communities remained balanced in size and genetic heritage and did not degenerate; the enormous task of controlling migratory circulation fell to her and the SPM bureau.

During the afternoon, freshly arrived tourists were encouraged to walk in the safety of the grounds of the hotel, to accustom themselves to gravity, atmosphere, and angstrom differences. There was much to see, including a zoo which housed some of the autochthonous species of Lysenka. Sygiek and Kordan teamed up with another couple of tourists; an exobotanist called Ian Takeido, a quiet young man who had spent most of his life in the Jovian subsystem, and Jaini Regentop, a pallid girl who was a DNA specialist.

The voice of a commentator, deep and paternal, followed them as they walked down one of the broad avenues of the zoo.

"Most of the trees on either side of you are classified as Lysenkan calamites, or horsetails. Their structure is very similar to that of trees which grew on Earth during the Carboniferous Age. Always remember that Lysenka II is only just emerging from its equivalent of the Devonian Age and entering its own Carboniferous. In other words, it is at the same stage of development as was Earth some 370 million years ago.

"You will already have noticed the trees we call Cage Trees. Such phyla never developed on Earth. Each tree is in fact a small colony of trees of up to fifteen in number. Their trunks grow first outwards from a common base, then upwards. Then, as they age, the trunks curl inward again, to meet in a knot of foliage some twelve feet above the ground. So a cage is formed — hence their name." The voice deepened

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into a chuckle. "We like to think that this habit of unity makes the Cage Tree the first example of socialist unity to be found in the vegetable world on Lysenka."

"Charming," Jaini Regentop said. "Charming. Such a constructive little joke, too."

That evening, the council of the Unity Hotel held a grand reception, with a banquet and many toasts and speeches, followed by dancing and a folk group brought over specially from Bohemia City on Titan.

Next morning, when the tourists stirred, it was to find that their living walls were blank, and their radio and vision screens not functioning. Only the internal communications of the hotel still operated. An embarrassed management council put out a hasty apology and explanation.

"The temporary suspension of external communications will in no way affect the expedition to Dunderzee Gorge planned for today. the LDBs, your vehicles, are micronuclear-powered. Unfortunately, all our communications are via comsat, while most of the power is beamed from the sun Lysenka to us also by satellite; these functions are in suspension temporarily, owing to a strike at Satellite Control in Peace City. We are happy to say that the hotel has its own power store with plentiful reserves for a week. Meanwhile, we apologize for any inconvenience and the loss of your living walls. As guests will appreciate, Lysenka II is a very primitive planet, which sometimes has its effect on the natures of people. Thank you."

The guests regarded one another unappreciatively.

"The powermen and the satellite engineers are trying to renegotiate their contract with the Planetary Praesidium," Ian Takeido told Kordan and Sygiek in a low voice, over breakfast. "I was talking to one of the hotel's technicians last night. It seems that because they are working on an extra-solar planet, they have to serve a full ten-year term before returning to the system. They want the term reduced to seven years."

"Gulfhopping is considerably expensive, you know," Sygiek said mildly.

"But *striking!*" Regentop exclaimed, looking over her coffee cup. "How primitive. Ian had to explain the term to me. I thought the penalty for striking was ..." She let her voice trail away.

"If you want something, then you have to negotiate for it," said Kordan. "A platitude, but true."

Takeido shook his head.

"These technicians see it as an emotional matter. What they are saying is, 'Earth is our Id — we must have it or die.'"

"'Id!' Another word I had never heard before," complained Regentop, laughing and looking anxiously at their faces.

"As an Academician, I can assure you that it is an archaic word indeed," said Kordan, pursing his lips. "And in this case almost inevitably misused."

There was a pause. Regentop leaned forward confidentially.

"Use your authority to explain to us what 'id' means, Jerezy Kordan," she said. "We are all of the elite — and out of the System. No harm can be done by

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a little talk here." She looked excited and smiled nervously at him as she spoke.

Sygiek folded her hands in her lap and looked out of the tall windows. "If words drop out of use, there is generally good reason for it," she said warningly. "They may serve as counters in subversive systems of thought. You understand that well, Jerezy Kordan."

"In this case, the explanation is only instructive," Kordan said placatingly. She continued to stare out of the windows. He turned to the others. "Id was an entity of ancient superstition, like a ghost. Briefly, long ago in the epoch before the advent of Biocom, several perverted interpretations of the nature of man flourished. Most of them assumed that man was not a rational economic being. Such may arguably have been the case before communalism provided him with the necessary rational socio-political framework within which he could function as a unit. 'Id' was a term coined by one of these perverted interpretations — a particularly pernicious system, a blind alley of thought which, I'm happy to say, was always opposed, even by our first communist ancestors."

He had fallen into an easy lecture style. Sygiek looked down; the others stared at his face with some admiration. Kordan continued, "In those bygone days, the physiological conflict between the brain, the central nervous system, and the autonomic nervous system was not understood. Misunderstanding of man's nature inevitably arose. The physiological conflict was interpreted as psychological, as originating in some hypothetical depth of the mind. The mind was regarded as very complex, like a savage independent world, almost. In this erroneous model of human physiology — that's what 'mind' really was — there was presumed to lurk in its muddy recesses various savage and socially destructive elements, waiting to overthrow reason. Those elements were bundled together under the term 'id.' It was a regressive force."

They had finished their meal. Sygiek stood up and remained looking down on the others, but Takeido leaned forward, clearly wishing to carry the subject further. Clasping his hands together earnestly, he said, "This is most interesting, Jerezy. If you are right — and of course I don't doubt that — then the striking technicians have it wrong. 'Earth is our Id'... Lysenka is the subversive forbidden place, so *it* should be the Id and Earth should be ... I don't know the term. I'm just a simple exobotanist."

Regentop patted his back and smiled proudly.

"'Super-ego,'" said Kordan. "Earth should be the super-ego." He laughed dismissively, disowning the term, and glanced up to see how Sygiek was taking the conversation.

"This discussion is too self-indulgent," she said. "'Speaking of error is itself error.' Let's finish and get into the buses. Most of the others have already gone ahead."

"These old theories were nonsense, inevitably," Kordan said to her, taking her arm as they left the dining room. "Medieval. Like alchemy."

She regarded him with slightly raised eyebrows and a smile he had not

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seen before. "But alchemy *led* somewhere, Jerezy Kordan, Academician. It provided one of the foundations of scientific advancement. Whereas psychoanalysis was a dead end."

"Ah ha, then you are also familiar with these ancient and interdicted models. *Psychoanalysis!*"

"It is part of my job to acquaint myself with what is forbidden."

He looked searchingly at her. She met his gaze. He said nothing, and they moved out into the open. Kordan stood on the steps, breathing deeply as he looked ahead.

Buses waited like great slumbering beasts.

The exobotanist, Takeido, caught Kordan's attention, coughed, and said apologetically, "It was a pleasure to listen to you talking at the breakfast table, Jerezy Kordan. Working on the Jovian moons, one is much alone. One thinks, one longs to talk ... to talk about many things, such as the topics you touched on. May Jaini Regentop and I ride with you to Dunderzee?"

Kordan looked at the youth, as if thinking how young and thin he was. He watched the black eyebrows twitch nervously on Takeido's forehead.

"You are at liberty to choose any seat you wish in the bus," he said. "But language is much more precious and must be guarded. Better to be resolute than curious. 'Resolution is the foe of the deviation,' as the saying has it. I imagine that applies as much on Jupiter and Lysenka as on Earth."

"Of course ..." said Takeido, and swallowed.

"Let's get aboard the buses, then," said Kordan smiling. He nodded at Sygiek. She nodded contentedly back, and they walked down the steps, fully in command of their world, toward the waiting buses.

The gates in the fortified perimeter of the Unity Hotel slid open. Above them fluttered a banner with the device of the United System and the legend:

STRIVE TOWARD THE SECOND MILLION YEARS OF BIOCOM-UNITY!

As the LDB rolled through the gateway, Sygiek noticed that she was seated next to the stocky man who had made the remark about chessputers on the gulfhopper not experiencing glee. He nodded genially, as if they were old companions.

"A session of idle sightseeing!" Sygiek exclaimed to Kordan, turning away from the other man. "I have never done such a thing in my life, and half-doubt the propriety of it now. Days are more to be valued when fruitfully occupied."

The stocky man leaned forward, clasping his hands between his knees, and said, addressing them both, "Don't be too strict with yourselves, friends. Savor enjoyment as a positive force in its own right. Idleness has virtues of its own."

"Exactly what I meant," said Kordan, pleasantly. "Idleness restores our energies."

The stocky man introduced himself as Vul Dulcifer 057, Chief Engineer responsible for the air-conditioning systems of Iridium, on Venus. He had a big hard head, with big hard features. Gazing out of the window at the passing scenery, he said, "Like everyone

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else, I am never idle. My work keeps me going thirteen E-hours a day, and I run various committees. 'Utopia is sustained only by hard work.' I know the party slogans, don't remind me. The system's a machine. If a few of us have made it to this classified planet, with all these degenerate capitalist animals running about, then we are of the elite, and I maintain that we have earned some idleness. I frankly see idleness as a just reward, not simply one more obstacle on the assault course of World Peace."

As she watched and listened to him speaking, Sygiek thought that she and Dulcifer could never be compatible. He was as small and dark as she was tall and pale. He was thickset, with massive shoulders; his every movement expressed energy. The irises of his eyes were a dark sea-blue, rolling between black fringes of eyelash. His dark hair was sparse, and clung close to his square skull. She was aware as she watched the movements of his clearly defined lips of a disturbance within her, a disturbance chased by the reflection, *He regards Kordan and me merely as two standard products of the system, without minds of our own ...*

A hostess, rosy of cheek, with long legs and a warm smile, came down the aisle of the bus, pausing to exchange a word with everyone. She was trim in her red uniform; most of the tourists wore sloppy-maos.

"Are you enjoying the primitive landscape?" she asked. "Isn't it charmingly undeveloped? What an inspiring symbol of potential."

"Yes," said Dulcifer. "And at the same time we're exercising our minds like good Utopianists with an argument about the nature of idleness."

Takeido and Regentop had been listening from the seat in front. The former turned and said to Dulcifer, "You seem to lack a little data, Utopianist. You see, idleness is a physiological malfunction. It's mistaken to treat it as a quality of mind, when injections can cure it as soon as it manifests itself."

As he spoke, he kept glancing at Kordan to see how he was taking this speech.

A bureaucrat by the name of Georg Morits leaned across the aisle and said vehemently, "You're right there, but let me remind you that idleness is still sometimes manifested as a mental quality in unfortunate throwbacks to *Homo sapiens*. I know. I have to deal with quite a few committals of that sort of person in my line of business. I'm in an office in Moscow, you know. The city of cities." They did know. This dull person had been boasting during the banquet of how beautiful it was in Moscow, an old city which had been the capital of the first communist state and many times rebuilt. "You can be legally charged with being a *Homo Sapien*, you know. It's in the statute banks now."

"Not on Venus, it isn't," said Dulcifer, sturdily. "That's like charging an animal with the offense of being an animal."

They made no response to that. They knew all about Venus, and the devolutionary tendencies of Iridium City.

"We are straying from the point. If I could remind you of the historical background to this argument —" Kor-

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dan began; but Sygiek cut him off, saying "Shall we just forget this silly discussion?"

Kordan looked hurt, but Dulcifer said, smiling to remove the sting from his remark, "You are too repressive for vacation-time, Utopianist Millia Sygiek! I'd like to hear what your companion was going to say. Frankly, scenery bores me, but I've never lost interest in my fellow human beings."

Warmth rose in Sygiek's cheeks. She turned a gaze on him which would have melted iridium but she said nothing.

"I was merely going to say — for the sake of the historical record — that those early genetic engineers who established *homo uniformis,* Man Alike Throughout, were the —"

"Forgive me, Academician Kordan, but I am in technoeugenics, working on the Central Council," said Jaini Regentop, giving him her polite smile, "and you are not correct in your phraseology. Those genetic engineers were merely instruments of change in the great progression from *homo sapiens* to *homo uniformis;* they took orders. First had to come the immortal work of physiologists and the great endotomists —"

"Jaini, you should not interrupt Jerezy Kordan," said Takeido. "He is an Academician."

"Then he will understand. Between them," said Regentop, adopting something of Kordan's lecturing manner, and addressing her remarks mainly to him, "the endotomists established the fact that man's physiological structure comprised three governance systems which were in conflict. Owing to the rapid evolutionary development of man from animal, those governance systems were not entirely compatible. We might in the same way complain of a machine that it was faulty because it contained too much wiring. The problem was one of efficiency."

Kordan nodded and looked bored, but Regentop pressed on.

"The great endotomists and physiologists developed a method whereby those governance systems could be developed into one harmonious super system. The three governance systems I refer to, by the way, were known as Central Nervous System, primarily a motor system, Autonomic Nervous System, primarily a sensual system, and Neocortex, primarily a thought system.

"To develop this more reliable super system, the bio-shunt was introduced. As you probably know, the bio-shunt — there's been a lot talked about it in this anniversary year — is an inbuilt processor which phases out much of the activity of the old automatic nervous system or renders it subject to the direct control of the thought system. An obvious example is the penile erection, once an involuntary act.

"I frequently impress on my classes that the bio-shunt is the very basis of our great Utopia. It has banished the emotional problems which always plagued *homo sapiens.* Wars, religions, romantic love, mental illness — all manifestations of outmoded physiological systems."

"This is what I mentioned earlier, Millia," Kordan said heavily to Sygiek. "Please continue, Jaini Regentop, if you so wish. You express yourself well."

Her voice took on a quieter note. "Yet *sapiens* had vision, too. Yes, he

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even visualized Utopia, the perfect place.

"And, in an ironic way, he achieved Utopia in the end, though it meant his extinction. When his physio-technicians and early endotomists invented the whole principle of Biological Communism — the theory behind the bio-shunt itself — then it became possible to rationalize the inharmonious governance systems genetically, passing on the improvement to succeeding generations. Through chromosome microsurgery, *sapiens* did away with all manner of systemic weakness, thus eliminating himself and ushering in a virtual new race. A race without absurd evolutionary flaws. A race truly capable of establishing Utopia. In a word, us. *Homo uniformis*, Man Alike Throughout."

They regarded each other's faces, smiling reflectively.

"And what has this ancient tale to do with idleness, except that it is itself an idle tale by now?" asked Dulcifer.

"It's the birth tale of the World State, no less," said Sygiek, frowning.

"Jaini Regentop has just explained," Takeido said to Dulcifer. "Idleness was an old *sapiens* weakness. It sprang from a lack of purpose, no doubt — from internal confusion. There's no physiological reason for idleness in these enlightened days, Utopianist. We've conquered it."

Dulcifer scratched his head. He laughed. "You're a bit young for a conqueror!"

Takeido slipped back into his seat.

"There's a Museum of Homo Sapiens in Moscow," Georg Morits added confidentially. "They were quite advanced for primitives, you know — even had a limited form of space travel, the principles of which were invented in Moscow. I can tell you such things, since you are of the elite, and not of the ignorant. You appreciate them. Ah, it's good to talk among equals."

III

They were sitting talking in the last bus. Three buses moved ahead of them, gradually drawing apart as they gathered speed down the embanked road. The great structure of Unity, which had dominated everything, dwindled behind them, swallowed by the everlasting landscape of Lysenka. Occasionally, as the road rose with the land, they could glimpse the shoulders of a distant plateau, riding above the warm obscurities of the plain.

Kordan clutched Sygiek's hand, but she soon withdrew it.

The hostess in her neat red uniform with the Outourist insignia had exchanged a word with everyone individually. She reached the front of the LDB, where she took up a microphone and addressed the passengers, smiling as she did so.

"Hello, friends of the system, my name is Rubyna Constanza 868, and I have the pleasure of being your guide for today. Welcome to the journey. We shall be away from Unity for two days, and shall spend tonight in comfortable quarters in the Dunderzee Gorge, which I feel sure you will enjoy. We shall view some of the wonders of this planet, and also some of its instructive blemishes. Refreshments will be served when we stop at midday. I am continually at your service. There are service bells by your fingertips."

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"She's very pretty," Takeido whispered. Regentop frowned for silence.

"First I would like to remind you of a few facts concerning this planet. You will be familiar with some of them, but facts take life from their substitutes in reality.

"This planet is large by the standards of the System Inner Planets, having an equatorial diameter of approximately 20,000 kilometers. Fortunately its mass is relatively light, so we do not suffer from oppressive gravity. Lysenka II revolves on its axis once every 33.52 E-hours, which makes for an inconveniently long day. You will be able to rest at refreshment-break, since your seats recline fully.

"As we can observe, it is cloudy overhead. The sun rarely shines through in these latitudes, though clouds may clear at evening. Lysenka is rather a warm and drowsy planet at this period of its history."

She indicated the world rolling past their windows. "There is a grove of Cage Trees to our left. Otherwise, vegetation is sparse. Most of the planet is semi-desert, owing to soil paucity and lack of microbacterial activity.

"Although the planet has been discovered for more than a million years, we established a base on it only ten years ago. The planet awaits development. The problem is an ideological one — what to do with the fauna. The World State is still considering this vital matter. Owing to the low energy life systems here, the fauna has not been able to establish itself over much of the globe. It would be possible to extirpate all the animals. That is a neat and attractive solution. On the other hand, they may prove invaluable for studies in behavior, and as a source for laboratory animals, etcetera."

Constanza had slightly hastened this part of her talk. She slowed her delivery again to add, "However, such problems need not enter our heads on your vacation, since the decisions rest with others. At this time, we need only enjoy the strange sights. On your right, you can see now a flock of kangaroolike creatures. I assure you there is no danger, since we are in constant radio contact with surveillance satellites. Well, that is, just today we are out of touch because of the technical difficulties of the strike; we are out of touch, but in any case we are perfectly safe in the bus. Notice that the creatures are regarding us with respect."

The animals now bounding along beside the road had no tails. Their resemblance to kangaroos began and ended with their small pointed heads and their way of leaping over the ground. For the rest, they were more manlike, and waved their fists with oddly human gestures at the bus as it flashed past.

"These animals eat vegetation and also flesh," said Constanza. "Their turn of speed is mainly to deliver them from those things that desire to eat them."

The bus curved away from the flat and proceeded down a long, well-cambered curve. Ahead loomed a gigantic wall of rock, crowned with fringes of the sappy white-stemmed horsetails. It was growing difficult to understand how the bus could avoid smashing into the rock face when a curve was turned and the vehicle plunged into a tunnel.

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The sides of the tunnel were lasered smooth. On the walls, inspiring slogans had been incised, slogans which contributed much to the moral tone of society. For the first time since leaving Unity, all the passengers sat up and paid attention out of the windows, sometimes reading aloud with pleasure words they had known since childhood.

Resolution is the Foe of Deviation
Unity Breeds Immunity
Never Think What Cannot Be Said
Eternal Vigilance Grants Eternal
Security: Without It Is Eternal Anarchy
There Are No Free Launches

The slogans glowed in enticing colors, smouldering into darkness again as soon as the bus had passed.

Suddenly, they were propelled back into daylight. As the rock fell away and the road ceased to curve, the tourists found themselves traveling over a tremendous plain. The floor of the plain — ugly, barren and broken — was dotted with rocky debris which rose in mounds. Now and then, a sluggish river could be glimpsed.

"We have entered the Great Rift Valley," Constanza said. "The Gorge is far ahead of us. In this area, and all the way to the Starinek Ocean away to the west, are contained most of the creatures populating Lysenka II. The rest of the planet is almost entirely empty, except for indigenous spiders and a few winged insects. Don't forget that solar physicists and geognosticians tell us that this world is a very long way behind our worlds in development. Which is no doubt why it is the last refuge of capitalism."

There was some laughter at this sally. Although most of the tourists had no way of knowing exactly what capitalism was, the word still retained smutty connotations over the ages.

"That's the River Dunder we can see occasionally over to your left. It is not large as rivers on this planet go. On the other hemisphere is a river surveyed from the air which is almost twice as long as the River Amasonia on Earth."

The superb road unwound before them, hour after hour. When it ran beside the River Dunder, more game was sighted, most of it fleeing for cover. The other three buses had disappeared into a tan distance which quivered in the noon heat.

Rubyna Constanza had taken a break from her commentary. Now she was back again, smiling prettily as before.

"You will have noticed many more animals beside the river. Mostly, they catch fish, or they prey on those who catch fish. They are very clever at concealment. The brave system workers who built this road have tales to tell of their viciousness. Those workers and the soldiers who defended them were the only members of our people ever to be allowed weapons on Lysenka II — with the exception of the garrison that permanently defends Peace City, of course.

"As I expect you all understand," and she gave them a beautiful smile as reward for that understanding, "perhaps the most remarkable event in the entire history of Lysenka, from the point of view of *homo uniformis*, was the arrival here of a colony ship from Earth, 1.09 million years ago in the past, in bitter pre-Utopian times on our home planet. In those far-off days, be-

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fore our culture was established worldwide, and before the science of cratobatics was developed, fifty light years was a challengingly long distance. The colony ship was not heading for the Lysenkan system but for another system, even farther away. However, something went wrong with the primitive drive, and the ship came down on this planet." She extended her hand forwards, pointing through the front window. "It made a forced landing somewhere ahead there, not so many kilometers from the Dunderzee Gorge. That colony-ship belonged to the now defunct *homo sapiens* capitalist system called America. It contained not less than —"

She stopped, gasping and staring through the window.

"Oh, sygygys! Look!"

Already most of the passengers were looking. There was an obstacle of some kind on the road ahead. As the bus plunged nearer, it could be seen that there was a slash right across the smooth surface, where the road had crinkled and collapsed.

The control systems of the bus were already automatically in operation. Its perceptions began to slow the heavy vehicle some milliseconds before the humans could respond. Brakes bit, squealing.

Momentum carried the bus forward towards the gap. Regentop flung herself into Takeido's arms. As the guide rushed shrieking toward the rear of the vehicle, Dulcifer grabbed her and held her close. Sygiek reached voluntarily for Kordan's arm. Some passengers screamed. Tires burned across the tarmac as the bus slewed sideways — and slid towards the obstruction.

The gap was no more than a meter and a half wide. The bus slid nearer, inertial systems bringing it almost to a halt. Then the front skirt went over the edge. The whole body tipped, teetered, and fell.

It crashed onto one shoulder, rolling till it settled on its side with a high rending sound. The passengers were flung into heaps along the right-hand side of the bus.

Dulcifer was among the first to recover. He saw that Constanza was unhurt and then began calling in a firm voice, saying that the danger was over and that everyone should climb out who could manage to do so. From the back of the bus, an older man, an underwater hydraulics technician called Lao Fererer, shouted out that he had the emergency exit open and would help anyone who needed help.

"My knee — it's so painful I don't dare move," gasped Kordan.

"Try," said Sygiek. She bit her bottom lip to stop it trembling.

One by one, helping and encouraging each other, the passengers climbed out. They gathered together on the road or sat dazedly on its verge. There was a little blood, but nobody was seriously hurt.

They looked about them, dazed by the unexpected accident, stunned by the heat outside the air-conditioned bus. Kordan, Lao Fererer and the woman with him, an interplanetary weather coordinator called Hete Orlon, and one or two other passengers, climbed to the upper side of the bus to gain a vantage point from which to survey the territory. It did not appear

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promising. Despite the great distances, the sunlight gave everything a cottony aspect, making seeing difficult and contributing to a dismal feeling of claustrophobia.

A thunderous silence reigned, punctuated by the ticking of the metal of the bus. A herd of two-legged animals, shaggy-maned and blunt of snout, gazed at them from a distance of a hundred meters. All stood in more or less identical poses of alertness. In the river, things swam, turning their seal-like heads toward the scene of the crash. Everything waited. Movement hung suspended in the damp, leathery air.

"Welcome to Lysenka II," said Ian Takeido. He laughed, but nobody else did.

IV

Kordan climbed down to stand with sober face beside Sygiek. The ongoing nature of a land vehicle; the whisper of air conditioning; the long-familiar experience of hearing a voice electronically transmitted; listening to mildly tedious lectures; promise of a hospitable destination; all those things had vanished which, while they existed, had shielded the tourists from the understanding that they were but specks on an alien face, a long way from the System, vulnerable.

Rubyna Constanza brushed down her red uniform and said, with a tolerable imitation of her official voice, "Please do not stray too far from the bus. There is no cause for alarm. We shall be missed when we do not rendezvous at the gorge with the other buses. Although the radio is not working, they can phone to Unity by land-line, and Air Rescue will send out immediately." As an afterthought, she added, "Normally, the bus itself is in constant radio contact with Unity."

"How many E-hours is all that going to take?" asked a fair-haired woman, a seasons technician with great experience of the Saturn microsystem. "It will be dark in another seven hours, won't it? What happens if no one has arrived by then?"

"We've still eight or nine hours of daylight, haven't we?" another voice asked.

These questions were never answered.

A row of dark heads appeared over the roadside embankment. Heads and shoulders, eyes, low brows. Scrutinizing the group of tourists. Regarding the wrecked bus. Nobody moved. Metal crackled.

Those dark heads and withered unimaginable faces had such a petrifying effect on the tourists that tides of time seemed to drift by like the clouds overhead. Then one of the animals hopped up from the bank and stood alertly on the highway. It took another leap, bringing it almost under the trailing skirt of the LDB. It curled back its lips and showed grey teeth.

The tourists shrank away, closing ranks. They were confronting something which filled them with an overwhelming sense of dread. The unknown had hitherto formed no part of their existences; everything that was regimented and comfortable quailed before this demon. Its darting gaze, its stance, challenged the rules they lived by.

"Look..." began Kordan. But he had nothing to say.

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The animal was 1.5 meters high. It remained where it was, in a crouch, content, master of the situation. Two of its fellows scrambled up the bank and joined it, standing slightly in its rear. The three of them waited, teeth bared, snouts twitching. The tourists could hear their continual sniffing, and the rasp of their nails on the road surface.

Roughly human-shaped, the animals possessed disproportionately long arms and large paddle-like front paws, which hung to the ground. Their feet were flat and almost round, and studded with callouses. The faces were startling, the sandy flesh contorted into whorls; the effect was of a cross between man and mole, with deep-sunk little eyes set behind an armored nose, and bristling hair covering most of the skull. The bodies were covered with patchy fur.

Hete Orlon began to sob.

"The Id!" exclaimed Takeido, not without relish.

Far from showing fear, the mole-creatures evinced signs which could be interpreted as eagerness to get at the tourists if only they knew how. The tourists watched as more creatures came swarming up the embankment. A dozen of them climbed nimbly up, to stand behind their leader. Their confidence was growing. They dared to look away from the tourists, grunting to each other and licking their furry lips.

Some sort of decision was arrived at between them. The leading mole-creature took a step forward, raising a paw at the same time. As he did so, a well-aimed boot struck him squarely in the muzzle.

With a cry, the creature clutched at his face. Blood burst from under his paws. He swung round, blundering among his companions. With one accord, they all turned. With one accord, they all ran, jumped and fled down the bank. In a moment, they were gone. The cottony landscape appeared deserted again.

Vul Dulcifer walked forward and retrieved his boot. He sat on the grey road surface, pulling it on methodically. His rough features betrayed no expression.

The tourists found their tongues again. The spell was broken.

They spread out across the road, peering anxiously through the thick light, arguing among themselves as to whether Dulcifer's violent action was justified. Had the animals been merely curious?

"It was a moment for individual action, comrades, not a committee meeting," said Dulcifer. He remained sitting in the road, looking at them.

Among the party was a general purposes doctor, a silent man called Lech Ozwartek, who was noticeable because he alone of the party wore a small goatee beard. He spoke now, addressing his remark to Dulcifer.

"You realize that you have now convinced those animals that we are hostile?"

Unmoved, Dulcifer said, "We *are* hostile."

However debatable Dulcifer's action, the group felt encouraged. Some of them climbed back on the side of the bus. Others stood on the bank, watching for signs of movement.

Kordan raised his arms and said in a commanding voice, "Listen to me. It

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is best that we form a leadership group to coordinate action. We should debate whether to set fire to the bus, in order to keep off the beasts until help arrives."

"There's food and drink and shelter in the bus," protested one woman, a dark-faced unionist leader from Mercury Second Station.

"We'll need to sleep in it tonight, if help does not arrive," said another.

"That's defeatist talk," said a third.

"Speak according to the rules of debate," said Kordan. "You will all get your chance. Sygiek 194 and I will hear all your points in turn, then we decide on a coordinated line of action. We must remain organized ... Unity Breeds Immunity."

In the long debate that followed, everyone stated his point of view, some timidly, some defiantly. From all this, Dulcifer stood aside, arms akimbo, looking toward the river. Leaving the group about Kordan, Sygiek went over to him and said, "You are sensibly watching for danger, Vul Dulcifer. We should post lookouts before talking. The next pack of beasts may prove less timid than the last."

"There are only so many boots to go around."

"It is questionable wisdom to allow wild beasts on a planet with innocent holiday-makers."

"It's their planet."

"Not any more."

"Millia Sygiek, while your friend Kordan is making his speeches, I want to go down this embankment and look around. My belief is that these molelike creatures undermined the road and wrecked our bus."

"Deliberately?"

"That we may be able to establish. Come down with me and see."

The embankment was steep. He ran down, digging his heels in as he went. As she followed him, and they slithered down to the level of the nearby river, Kordan called her name. She did not look back.

Kordan came to the edge of the highway and called, "Where are you two going? We must not split up. Remain united!"

She followed Dulcifer. She wondered if something in his stocky figure, his air of confidence, reminded her of the director of the creche in which, with a thousand other infants, she had spent the tender years of infancy, following her exobirth.

Under the low cliffs where the river had once flowed, the land was strewn with debris. Here and there, the terrain had been built up into long winding tunnels, standing over a meter high. It was hard to determine whether these odd features were natural or artificial. Between the tunnels and on top of them grew fleshy ferns which sprayed rusty spores into the air as Dulcifer and Sygiek brushed past. Several tunnels led under the embankment on which the road was built.

Dulcifer kicked at the soil. "Here's where the road collapsed. There's no doubt in my mind that the tunnels are made by the molelike animals. They would be safe in their tunnels from most other predators. They burrowed under the road and the freeway collapsed — presumably by accident, not from intent. Depends how intelligent they are. All the same ..."

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He noticed her expression. "You're looking upset. What's the trouble?"

She drew herself up. "Utopianist Dulcifer, I have observed how free you are at expressing opinions. You hold an ill-concealed contempt for democratic consensus opinion, that's obvious. Then you casually order me to follow you here, as if I were some inferior — an ateptotic from Centauri, say. In my judgement, you are at least a potential deviationist, and I advise you to keep a check on your behavior."

While he stared at her, a bead of sweat ran down his brow, into his eyelashes, distorting the image of her. As he cleared his eye with a finger, he said, "Or else you'll put in a report, eh? I did not order you down here. You followed me."

"We are not supposed to split up."

"Let's forget it and concentrate on real problems." He took a step toward her. "You're bossy but you are no fool, Sygiek. We can be attacked at any time, once these foul creatures get used to us and realize we are not a menace. By attacked, I mean attacked, overcome and eaten, you understand. The question is, what do we do? I wanted to see —"

"Hey, you two!" The Moscow bureaucrat, Georg Morits, was scrambling down the embankment toward them, his figure outlined against the tan sky. They faced him as he slithered to a halt and wagged a finger at them. "Aren't you forgetting some elementary rules? 'Action is corporate ...' We are setting up an action committee, and we require that you both return to the LDB at once."

Dulcifer made a move toward him, and Morits backed against one of the tunnels.

"Don't chant slogans at me, fellow. I don't sit on my arse in a Moscow office all day. Survival is not to be had through mouthing dogma. I'll come when I'm ready. Tell Kordan that."

Morits pressed himself against the tunnel wall, saying weakly, "Don't attack me for what was a unanimous decision. There are unknown dangers here and the — uh-uh-uh-uh-uh- ..."

As his voice failed, his face went ashen. His body seemed to shrivel. He staggered but could not fall. A cry almost like a solid thing was torn from his throat.

Rushing to take hold of him, Sygiek and Dulcifer saw sharp claws and leathery paws grasping the bureaucrat's thighs, biting deep into his flesh until blood seeped across his clothes. Those terrible hands had struck at him through the wall of the tunnel from behind. Had Morits been sitting there, the claws would have struck his throat and he would already be dead.

Calling loudly for assistance, the two Utopians seized Morits' arms and tried to drag him forward. He uttered another desolate scream. As they pulled him slowly away, part of the tunnel wall behind him collapsed. Amid falling sand milled several of the mole-creatures. Their trap had been sprung and they were still clasping their prey. Their muzzles were bloodied. Morits was already being devoured.

For a moment they crouched at the hole, as if contemplating an attack. Other faces appeared in the gap, sniffing.

Dulcifer let go his hold on Morits

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and kicked out, catching a bristling flank with his boot.

"Stand back!" Sygiek ordered. She pulled a small gun out of her tunic. Dulcifer barely had time to duck before she straightened her arm and fired two shots in a professional manner into the hole.

The gun was hetrasonic. Even as two buzzing notes sounded, two of the mole-creatures fell forward, clutching their bellies as they went. Writhing, they dropped to the ground, but hardly were they there before their fellows had taken them, dragging them into the tunnel. Bellowing, Dulcifer rushed forward and grabbed one of the wounded creatures, wrenching it away from its fellows, kicking out to fend off another attack. The rabble had had enough. Holding the other wounded creature, they retreated into the hole and disappeared from view.

Dulcifer and Sygiek turned and stared at each other. Both were pale. Dulcifer dashed sweat from his brow.

"You are not permitted to carry a gun," he panted. "System legality and so on."

She said, "I have a license."

He wiped at the sweat again and looked stupidly down at the ground. He required no more explanation. Millia Sygiek was a member of the dreaded USRP, and Reason Police were authorized to carry weapons and fire when necessary.

"So you hunt with that pack," he said heavily. "I'm sorry to hear it. I took you for a decent woman."

The tourist party on the embankment had heard the scuffle. Some of them were already hurrying down to help. Dulcifer stood back and let them. He retained his hold on the mole-creature which Sygiek had shot; it was now dead. He followed as the others tenderly carried Morits up to the road and into the shade of the overturned bus. A trail of blood dripped from the wounded bureaucrat.

Kordan and the grey-haired hydraulics technician, Lao Fererer, had established themselves as provisional co-directors of the party. They cleared a space for the bodies and called for bandages.

The guide, Rubyna Constanza, climbed into the bus, reappearing with bandages and medicaments. She set to work in a businesslike way to tend Morits, kneeling by him and turning him gently over on his face. Then she cried aloud. Morits' clothing, the small of his back, his buttocks, thighs, calves, part of one arm, had been eaten away as if by rats, exposing bone. Blood was seeping over the road. Mercifully, Morits was unconscious.

Constanza looked up into the tense faces round her.

"What can we do about his wounds here? He will surely die. In the Unity, at Peace City, the accident units could grow replacement arteries and flesh but here.... Death's certain."

Nobody spoke. It was the obscene word 'death' which shocked them. At home, there was only a fulfilled Passing On, as the citizen moved into an all-embracing pallor which was in harmony with the system. Here on Lysenka II, you went out in crimson, the hue of rage and passion.

Kordan spoke, mastering his voice. "Do what you can for him, Rubyna

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Constanza. Now we see why we are inevitably screened before we can visit an Extra-solar Planet. Instead of Eternal Security, we are faced with Eternal Anarchy. In the System, before the days of Biocom and the establishment of World Unity—"

"We already have the speeches by heart," Sygiek cut in. "It is not an hour since this vehicle crashed and already one of us is severely wounded. Danger surrounds us, and our first duty to the state is to triumph over that danger and survive. All of you make sure you now understand exactly the situation in which we find outselves. Ecologically and ideologically, these creatures are our enemies." Her arm swept around to cover the wilderness about them. "We are Number One Target for every living monster out there."

Dragging the dead mole-creature by its mane of hair, Dulcifer pushed his way into the center of the group. He dumped it beside the bleeding body of Georg Morits.

"Sygiek is right. We don't want speeches, we want action. We don't want propaganda, we want information. We aren't in Utopia now. You know what permits Utopia to flourish? I'll tell you — protein. A plentiful supply of protein, eh? The one prime fact about Lysenka you'd better remember is that from the word Go it suffers from protein-deficiency on a grand scale. Know what that means, comrades? *We can be eaten.* To the things that exist here, we are protein on the hoof, and we have to fight."

V

A murmur of shock and protest rose from the stranded tourists, but Dulcifer pushed on through it.

"We may be efficient in the System, but we have had no external enemies for countless centuries. Here, we are inefficient. On this dud, murderous world, we are just bait. Food, nothing more. We need knowledge and leadership to survive even for a few hours."

"Collective leadership," said Lao Fererer, to a murmur of agreement. "We have lived by our principles — we are certainly not going to abandon them in a crisis."

"We adapt," Dulcifer said firmly. "Lysenka II is just entering what corresponds with the start of Earth's Carboniferous Age, hundreds of millions of years ago. We are as good as stuck in the past, long before Biocom was thought of. We need to understand that situation as clearly as possible. Rubyna Constanza, you're the guide — give us a quick summary of planetary conditions as we have to face them in this Rift Valley."

Constanza had finished bandaging the badly wounded man. She rose to her feet and faced them. After a swift glance at Kordan, the Outourist girl spoke as if still delivering an address on her consigned vehicle.

"The evidence for Lysenka's having just emerged from a Devonian Age is complex, and has much to do with the state of the local sun. But geological and biobotanical evidence reinforce a general picture. Essentially, we have here a world of primitive life. In the oceans are fish some meters long with bony head armor. Also trilobites. System scientists have discovered bones of tetrapod amphibians in this valley

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which resemble a terrestrial rhipidistian order. That is to say, not fossil bones — the creatures existed recently but were all eaten by the invaders. In other parts of the planet, toward the tropics, they still exist, haunting the shores of the Borodinian Lakes.

"The plant life is of a matching antiquity, as we would expect. You may see dragonflies of up to seventy centimeters wing span. They are becoming extinct because their larvae in the rivers are regarded by the animals as a delicacy. They lived particularly in the swamp region to the west of this road, where there are forests of giant scale trees. Such forests are more frequent near the equator. Here you will mostly find cage trees, horsetails, calamites, maybe some gingkos, and of course fern trees and fern, with no seed-bearing plants. There are no flowers on Lysenka II, a fact which some of our visitors have complained about. There are also giant sequoias, bearing their stiff wooden flowers or cones.

"Thus we see that the only brains on the planet are dim and instinct-driven. No creature at all resembling mankind could possibly have emerged for millions of years, if it had not been for the capitalist ship which crash-landed in this region so long ago."

The tourists had listened attentively if anxiously to all this. Running a hand through his sandy hair, Takeido said, "Yes, I would like to amplify briefly what Rubyna Constanza has been saying. I am an exobotanist with five years fieldwork on the planet Sokolev. As Constanza implies, here on Lysenka Nature has yet to invent the angiosperm. That's seeds in an encased ovary, the opposite of gymnosperms. An angiosperm is a nutritious little food-package which supports seeds in the primary stage of their life. Spores or unpackaged seeds have no such advantage — they fend for themselves and their mortality rate is high. You can't eat spores. But angiosperms — those little food-packages are what caused the first proliferation of mammals over the face of Earth. They can make a world get up and go. So this world is a non-starter — as yet, at least. Thank you."

"As for the lack of grass," began Regentop, but Dulcifer cut her off.

"That's the essence of it. There are no grasses on this world, no cereals, no high-energy packets for animals to eat — no basic requisite for the support of a grazer-predator system such as grew up on Earth and Sokolev and elsewhere. Lysenka has not yet reached a stage where it can naturally support anything called animal life."

"You talk a great deal, Utopianist Dulcifer," said Fererer, and pointed to the dead mole-creature, "but this animal you brought here —"

"You should not lead even a sedentary committee," said Dulcifer, pointing a finger at Fererer, "if you have not grasped the salient point that there was reason for our being screened before we were allowed on Lysenka II. This is not an animal. There are no real animals on Lysenka II. The whole grazer-predator system is *human* in origin."

With his toecap, he rolled the mud-covered tunneler over until it sprawled on its back with its wound visible, one arm stretched across the road, one limp across its chest.

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"Look at it, Fererer, and you others. Look and feel pity. See its retractable genitals, its joints, its anatomical structure. It is made what it is by harsh conditioning. It is just a poor savage misfit. This is what it has been reduced to, generation by generation. But its ancestors were our ancestors. They were human, *homo sapiens,* a poor confused race that blundered around until it found the stars. Same goes for every damned animal we are likely to encounter in this valley. They're ex-human stock. That's the danger we have to understand. We are up against not instinct, but cunning."

It was the statement *Its ancestors were our ancestors* which provoked the biggest murmur. Sygiek's voice cut through their comments.

"Utopianist Dulcifer, I hereby give you notice that you will be reported for deviationism on our return to Unity. You waste valuable time, and you discuss Classified information before someone who is not a member of the elite."

"But the guide *knows,*" exclaimed a ferrous metals analyst called Che Burek. "She knows, she lives here, she's been indoctrinated."

"She is still only a guide, a worker," said Sygiek. "No offense, Comrade Constanza. Except for Fererer, we did not need reminding that all Lysenkan animals claim descent from the capitalists who crashed here. Of course there are dangers; but the fact that the animals are semi-human will enable us to use the system's most powerful weapon — *reason!*"

Dulcifer uttered a dry laugh and kicked the corpse so that it rolled against the chassis of the bus.

"That comes well from you, Sygiek! You should know better. You shot this thing."

"Enough. No indulging in personalities," said Kordan, stepping forward. "More than one of us is capable of making reports. We understand our position, don't we? The bus log tells us that we are approximately two hundred and fifty kilometers out from the Unity Hotel. Six hours of daylight remain. We have emergency flares and torches and other equipment in the vehicle, also a trolley which will carry supplies. We are now going to march in a body back to the safety of our hotel. The likelihood of attack on the road is remote."

Usla Dennig, a woman from the Cupran State who was accompanying Che Burek, said "Such a walk will take us over two E-days, without allowing for rest periods. That means a Lysenkan day and a half. And by the way, I'm one of the System's leading seasons technicians, and I believe a storm is brewing."

"We have made our decision," said Kordan and Fererer together.

"May I put forward an alternative, although I am only a worker?" asked Constanza. She was a slight, trim figure, and she regarded them almost with an amused air. "Unity is a stiff uphill march, and I presume none of you is used to walking far. There is a nearer refuge, and it lies downhill. At the Gorge itself is a comfortable restaurant with plenty of restrooms, saunas, and so on, plus a swimming pool in part of the lake especially for your convenience."

"How far away is the Gorge?" asked a dozen voices.

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"Under an hour's LDB travel. Say one hundred and eighty, one hundred and eighty-five kilometers. We shall be safe at the Gorge."

They held an impromptu discussion.

While they were talking, a distant note of a horn was heard.

"A vehicle!" someone exclaimed, and they all ran to look up and down the road. One or two of them climbed on the bus.

The freeway lay empty in both directions, fading into dun-colored haze. They were completely isolated from civilization. To one side, perhaps a kilometer away, the plain ended and an old green forest began. A herd of creatures was issuing from the trees and coming at a brisk gait toward the embankment and the river that lay between forest and embankment. In the thick light, it was impossible to distinguish their characteristics clearly.

Everyone stood and watched.

"I'll get those emergency flares," said Che Burek, but he made no move.

The herd comprised perhaps fifty individuals. They progressed with a lolloping gait, and seemingly on all fours. At the rear were three runners proceeding with a more upright stance. One of these three raised an instrument to his mouth and blew a ragged note. This was the horn they had heard.

The sound of it — unpleasantly reminiscent of a huntsman's horn — was enough to promote terror among the tourists. Without waiting to form a committee, they climbed into the bus, scrambled through doors and windows. Only Kordan, Takeido and Dulcifer were left standing on the road.

"Assist me in getting Georg Morits into the coach," said Kordan to Dulcifer, going over to the wounded man.

Together the three of them heaved Morits up the slope of the cab, where the other hands helped lift him inside as gently as possible.

At this juncture, Morits roused from his coma, struggled and started feebly screaming. His bandages began to ooze. He waved his arms in pain, smearing blood everywhere. A convulsion seized his entire body, he arched himself backward, cried again, collapsed. Lech Czwartek, the doctor, was by his side; after examination, he shook his head and pronounced Morits dead.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth than Hete Orlon went into an hysterical fit. She threw herself about, tore her hair, and struck at Leo Fererer as he tried to comfort her. Then she hurled herself weeping on the dead body, crying incoherently.

"Mother, mother, what have I done to you? They have taken all your beads away. It's not for me and not for you. No one's to blame, mother, no one's to blame, I swear — not me, not you! Why did you ever leave me? We're both safe together, little mother!"

Fererer put his arms around her heaving shoulders, trying to comfort her. Turning a red face to the others, he said, "I don't know what she is saying. I can assure you she was an exobirth, like the rest of us. She had no mother. She was brought up in a creche with her other siblings in Mali Zemlya."

While Orlon subsided into troubled gasps, the creatures from the forest were drawing closer. They took their time, swinging along between the sparse

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green fronds, looking perpetually left and right.

Their features were not more clearly distinguishable. They were brown-and-white striped. Their ears were remarkably large and round, and cupped forward almost as if they formed extensions to the lower jaw.

"They look like zebras," said Dennig, in a relieved voice. "Could they be grazers, rather than carnivores?"

The herd slowed, skirting some mole tunnels. They approached the river with due caution. Occasionally they stopped entirely, raising their front feet off the ground to look around in a manlike stance. The tourists were fascinated.

"To imagine that they were once humans ..." exclaimed Lydy Fracx.

"To think that they were once capitalists," said Kordan.

"To think that they are born inside the female still," said Takeido. "Only when Biocom delivered our kind from that burden could the familial societies be dismantled and a true global society established."

"Quiet!" said Sygiek.

The striped herd had seen the bus. They looked at it for a long time and then moved toward the river. Wide stretches of sand on either side of the water showed how the river had shrunk from its original state; but it was still considerable and looked treacherous, with boulders rising above its rolling surface here and there, and a channel in the middle where the race was deep, sending up a mane of foam which seemed to run perpetually before a silent wind.

The leaders of the zebras plunged into the water and the rest followed. One of the rear runners blew his horn again like a challenge. Females and younger members of the group were positioned protectively inside a circle of pressing bodies as they braved the flood. The leaders had reached the deeper water when they were attacked. A tough grey-maned male suddenly fell to his knees and almost disappeared beneath threshing water. Two of his companions grabbed him with their forefeet and pulled him up. A dark-bodied seal-creature came up with him, its fangs sunk into his belly. It was immediately attacked by the other zebra-people.

More of the seals appeared. General confusion ensued, in which more than one of the younger zebras was hauled screaming beneath the flood. The first seal was dispatched with a stunning blow. It lost its grip and was carried rapidly downstream. Something grey and fast had it almost at once, and it disappeared from sight.

The zebra herd milled and plunged about. It had backed into shallower water. The horn was blown again; as it was raised in the air to sound three tipsy notes, the watchers saw its elaborate design. Afterwards, they were to argue whether it was fashioned from bone, wood, or metal.

Those brazen notes rallied the indecisive creatures. Wheeling, they moved back to the far bank in good order. Without once looking back at the spot where several among them had been lost, they moved along the top of the cliff with that all-fours gait until they grew small in the distance.

"We could have driven them off

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easily, if it had come to it," said Kordan breezily. "Now, let us gather supplies together and prepare to walk down to the Gorge as soon as we can."

"I have just remembered something important," said Jaini Regentop. "Every ten kilometers or so along the road, there are landphones. Presumably it was a system installed for the convenience of the roadbuilders. I observed the phones from the bus. We can walk to the nearest one and phone for help."

"Why didn't you have the sense to mention this before?" asked Takeido.

"Why didn't the guide mention it? She has seen those phones over and over again."

"I had forgotten," said Constanza, snapping her fingers. "I have never known of any occasion to use those phones. Besides, I'm only a stupid worker, aren't I?"

"We have occasion to use the phones now!" said Kordan. "Our plan of action is clear. No more delay. We walk toward the Gorge and stop at the nearest landphone. If it works, we summon help. Then it may be best to return here to the bus and wait."

"And find it already over-run by ferocious animals!" exclaimed Hete Orlon, who was still looking tearful. "I am not leaving the safety of this bus, whatever the rest of you decide."

Ignoring the interruption, Kordan continued, "If the phone doesn't work, we carry on toward the Gorge. Rubyna Constanza has told us that it is only one hundred and eighty kilometers. She also informs me that a routine maintenance crew patrols the road from Peace City at dawn every morning, so relief will be on its way, even if we cannot get through by landphone — and even if one of the tourist buses does not drive back from the Gorge to find what has happened to us. Is this all agreed? May we have a show of hands, comrades."

Disagreement immediately broke out. What should be done about Orlon? Others besides her did not want to leave the bus. Would not a big party on the road be a target for attack?

It took half an E-hour to decide that a small party of six with provisions would go forward. The rest would stay by the bus.

"Who has to go in this small party?" asked Czwartek, anxiously scratching his beard. "As a doctor, my duty is to stay here with the larger party."

"It is a privilege to go forward, Utopianist Doctor," cried Sygiek, flinging up her hand. "I shall go with my partner, Jerezy Kordan. Fererer will remain here in charge of the bus party, and to look after poor feeble creatures like Orlon. Volunteers to go with Kordan and me to assemble here in a line. We want no cowards, either. This is a miserable backward capitalist planet for which we should feel every contempt."

Several volunteers stepped forward, among them the burly Dulcifer.

"Utopianist Dulcifer, you are under criticism," said Sygiek. "You will remain with the bus."

Kordan touched her arm. "You must not give all the orders," he said. "Dulcifer is a resourceful man, even if he is from Venus. Let him come in our party."

After some further argument, the six were agreed upon. Besides Sygiek,

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Kordan and Dulcifer, the party was to consist of Rubyna Constanza and the two young men from different sectors of the Martian State, Ian Takeido, the young exobotanist, and Che Burek, the metals analyst. Takeido's partner, Regentop, was to have gone, but she and Takeido quarreled, so that Burek stepped into her place. He was a well-built cheerful man who announced that he would be pleased to take orders.

VI

The six set off, waving farewell and giving the System salute. They took with them a motorized luggage truck which had been stowed in the rear compartment of the bus. On this were loaded provisions, flares and other items. They marched sturdily down the center of the freeway, in single file with the truck in their midst. The bus was left behind and obscured by a slow curve in the road. They were alone in the immense tan landscape. Silence dwelt over them.

A breeze rose and died. An immense dragon-fly came to inspect them, hovering above them for some way. The river meandered away from the road. The land became more uneven. They remained in the center of a great inverted bowl of soupy air. Only once did the sun shine through the cloud sufficiently to be remarked as a blurry globe.

An E-hour and a half had passed before they saw the post of a landphone in the distance. By it stood a large road sign. As the party approached, the letters formed themselves into words:

DUNDERZEE GORGE 200 KM.
Work — Enjoy — Learn Even
From Scenery

"Oh, it's much farther than I remembered," Constanza exclaimed. "This journey is so fast and easy by LDB."

"We're certainly learning more than we want from this damned scenery," said Dulcifer.

"Just recall that the magnificent road on which we walk is a part of our culture," said Kordan.

When they reached the phone, it was Sygiek who opened the armored box and switched on. The others stood by the trolley, looking on expectantly. The small screen did not light.

"Defunct," she said. She switched off and closed the box. Takeido pushed her aside and tried himself, joggling the switch up and down, without result.

"So much for our culture," he said. He looked half-regretfully at Kordan. "We'll never make the Gorge. You and I will never have our confidential discussion. These — these protein-seekers will have us as soon as the sun goes down." He hopped on top of the luggage truck and began to whistle.

Kordan cleared his throat, frowned at the younger man, then stared up at the low clouds overhead.

They stood there forlornly under the big sign, avoiding each other's gaze.

"Can we go back to the bus?" asked Constanza. "I know it sounds decadent, but my shoes are pinching my feet."

"Walk without your shoes," said Sygiek, curtly. "We must strike on to the next phone and the one after that, if necessary. It's no good giving up, comrades. Let's keep some good Utopianist hope in our hearts."

"And what should we keep in our

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heads?" asked Burek. Shaking his head, he said to Sygiek, "You and Kordan talk so much. Blowing never warmed porridge, as the old country saying has it." He gave the impression of a withdrawn man, which made his remarks the more effective, especially as he spoke in a slow heavy way, drawing his brows together as he did so. "My friends, we must suppose that the tunnelers ripped out the phonecables back by the coach. So no phones are going to work all the way to the Gorge, are they? Use your brains."

"Exactly so. That's another reason for getting back to the bus," said Constanza.

"It may be an excuse but it is not a reason," said Burek. "I am myself for continuing. I merely do not want us to suffer disappointment every time we reach a phone and find it out of order."

"Let me remind you that our decision was to make for the Gorge," said Kordan. "The others rely on us to carry out our intention. We should inevitably be criticized if we went back having achieved nothing."

"That's up to them," said Takeido, sliding off the truck. "I'd rather be criticized than eaten. Not that I can bear either." He clutched his forehead in sudden tension. "I wish I had never heard of Lysenka II! Listen, if we walked back to the phone post situated *before* that fatal bit of tunneling, we should find the line working."

"Why didn't you suggest that at the bus?" wailed Constanza.

He took her hand. "Because it has only just occurred to me, of course, you lovely creature."

Dulcifer burst out laughing.

"What do you find amusing?" Burek asked him. "Are you for going on or back?"

"There's something in what Takeido says. Better disgrace than digestion. I am for going back."

"How typical of you," said Sygiek. "Anything to be difficult. That makes three wishing to go on and three wishing to go back. Do we split up again into two parties?"

"Let's just have a rest," said Constanza. She sank to the ground, and Takeido sat companionably beside her. In the argument that followed, she played no part; her bare feet spoke tenderly for her. The other four stood solidly on the road, debating and looking across the bleak landscape.

They were still arguing when Sygiek burst out, "You spineless people, you have sore feet but no spirit! The Gorge it must be. We can walk throughout the night, using torches and flares to ward off attack. I will go alone if necessary."

At which Dulcifer nodded, smiling, and gave her a round of silent applause.

"It's not a matter of spirit but of understanding the situation," said Burek, drawing his brows together. "The six of us would be no match for an attack by thirty or forty of these creatures. Our duty is to recognize realities and return to the main party to acquaint them with the situation. You wish to go on for personal reasons, Millia Sygiek, because you are a person keen to dominate others and subject them to your will. Jerezy Kordan wishes to go on, not because he is strong but because he is weak and wishes to please you. Set your personality aside and see sense, Utopianist."

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Dulcifer clapped Burek on the back and gave a bark of laughter.

Burek looked at him steadily. "You are as much subject to your personal desires as they," he said. "And you are more to blame because you have more understanding."

Breaking from his silence, Kordan said, "No more rustic opinions, please, Che Burek. Remember we are all Utopianists and derive our strength through unity. We have no decision to make — we will go forward as already decided."

Takeido gave a low whistle, "Comrades, the ex-capitalists are beginning to take an interest in us once more." He stood up and pointed through the thick atmosphere.

All turned to look where he indicated. Down from the road, across a wearying jumble of rocks and canyons studded with horsetails, their gaze traveled, searching the brown wilderness until their eyes lit on a group of figures crouching on a prominence and surveying them.

As if they had waited to be seen, the distant figures rose and began to climb slowly down in single file.

"Not many of them," observed Kordan. "Stupid of us not to bring binoculars along. We will continue to walk on at a steady pace. No cause for alarm."

Taking hold of the luggage trolley, he set the example. Sygiek fell in beside him, Burek and Dulcifer followed. Takeido helped Constanza to her feet and they walked behind the others, Takeido keeping hold of the guide's hand.

Without undue haste, the indistinct figures of the enemy scrambled down to the floor of the rift valley and moved toward the road, closing in as the minutes passed. It was clear that the Utopians were their target.

As the trolley growled before them over the road, Sygiek said quietly to Kordan, "Do you notice they seem to have two heads. Oh, I feel such horror — less fear than horror. Surely they were never of *homo sapiens* stock? Shall we commence running?"

"If we run, so will they. My knowledge of history tells me that it might make better sense to fire off some flares and try to scare them away. Allow me to say that I fear more for your safety than for mine. Dearest Millia, what should we do?"

She looked at him and smiled tensely. "I will back whatever you do."

He flashed her a grateful look. "Let's try to drive these monsters off."

The six stopped in the middle of the road and drew together. A case of flare-guns was broken open; armed, they turned to face the creatures now rapidly approaching across the barren valley.

The enemy halted. It consisted of five ferocious individuals, each looking more formidable than any life form the tourists had seen so far. Each wore a kind of coat of short, bristling spines. Each had a face painted with drab green vertical stripes; two black horizontal stripes partly masked the eyes. Each had hair which piled up stiffly like cock's feathers above its head. They resembled enormous perambulating cacti.

The exception was the leader, who halted ahead of his four companions. A bone with sharply spiked ends pierced the flanges of his nostrils. On his head, above a mass of unruly yellow hair, he

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carried a skull like a crown, the teeth of its upper jaw biting into his forehead. The skull was painted in similar patterns to his face. It was this skull that, in a moment of fear, had made Sygiek think the newcomers were two-headed.

They were mounted on steeds, carrying spears and sitting erect. In their watchful silence, they were extremely menacing. Despite their extraordinary garb, they bore more definitely than any other creature encountered on Lysenka the stamp of humanity.

"Terrifying!" said Takeido. He clutched his mouth with his hand.

"Do we or don't we use the flare-guns?" demanded Constanza, in an urgent whisper. "If we had just one good gun, we could wipe them all out." She clung to Takeido.

"When I give the signal, fire into their faces," said Sygiek. "And not until I give the signal, understand?"

The hunters were dismounting. Their steeds, their debased two-legged horses, were zebra-creatures, similar to the ones which had attempted unsuccessfully to cross the river. They carried the hunters piggy-back. Narrow saddles were secured just above their rumps. Spiked stirrups hung to their knees. When their riders dismounted, the five zebras fell to the ground, showing every sign of exhaustion, and took no further interest in the proceedings.

The five hunters stepped forward, bristling in their strange armor. They held their spears at the ready. The leader grunted a word of command, never lifting his scrutiny from the tourists standing on the road above him. One of his men turned in leisurely fashion, lifted his fingers to his painted lips, and whistled. Two notes. Pause. Then the two notes repeated.

The landscape filled with dogs. Yapping shrilly, they rose from the ground on all sides, a ferocious hunting pack. Their coats were stiff and bristling like those of their masters. Some of them had faces like wolves, some were blunt-faced and more human. Some ran only on four legs, some went sometimes on two. All converged on the party at bay on the road.

Within seconds, the tourists were surrounded.

"Flares?" asked Dulcifer. "I'll shoot the first hound to nip my ankles."

"Wait," said Burek. "They're not attacking us."

The leader of the hunters moved forward, striding through the snarling pack. He jumped effortlessly on to the road and confronted the tourists, standing as solid as a great barrel. He pointed at them and spoke.

The series of guttural noises he made was rapid and without meaning for them. They cringed before him until Kordan stepped forward.

"We are people of importance," Kordan told him. "World Unity and the System are behind us. We demand that you help us return to Unity Hotel. Understand?"

"You're welcome to your stinking planet," shouted Takeido, when the other made no sign. "We just want to get home."

Sygiek held out her hand. In it was a packet of bread rolls with vegetable filling, made up by the hotel that morning. She offered it to the chief.

"A gift," she said. "You take it, you aid us."

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The hunter chief turned, came close, and regarded her, ignoring her outstretched hand to stare into her eyes.

A strong psychic shock overcame her as her gaze met his. He was lean, arrogant, ruthless; those characteristics beamed from his attitude, from his narrow eyes. And some other quality that she had never met before, some mysterious mainspring of life which assaulted her, before which she felt humble. Of that unwanted humility she was ashamed; but she dropped her eyes submissively before his slitted gaze.

He snatched the bread package and hurled it to the dogs. Constanza clutched Takeido, who put an arm protectively around her. Seeing the movement, the leader flicked his head around and glared at them. Then he made an imperious gesture which there was no mistaking. They were to follow him.

From his henchmen came more whistles. Additional hunters appeared from cover. They leapt on zebra-creatures and galloped forward, often accompanied by dogs. Yelping with excitement, they poured up to the road and overran it. The tourists were surrounded by milling men and hounds. Other warriors kept appearing.

More imperious gestures, more snarled commands.

"We have no choice but —" began Kordan, pale of face, when Takeido fired his flare-gun at the chief hunter.

The range was less than four meters. The chief had half-turned to summon his companions. The flare struck his shoulder and exploded, sending him tumbling among his hounds. Showers of green light burst among the wolf-pack. Snarling creatures fled in all directions.

"Everyone fire!" cried Sygiek. "It's our only chance." Her flaregun exploded as she spoke. Her five comrades followed her example.

Green dazzle filled the dun world. Several hunters fell, some ran away, the zebra galloped about shrieking. It made no difference. Fresh hunters materialized from the barren ground. They hurled themselves on the tourists and bore them to the ground by force. This was accompanied by savage yelling, intimidating in itself.

Bruised and frightened, disarmed, the tourists lay where they had been thrown. Hunters and dogs executed an angry parade around them, stamping spears or feet against the road surface. The tourists were able to make an unpleasantly close inspection of the hounds as they milled by.

Some of the dogs were dogs, snapping or jumping over one another. Some of them were children of the hunters, running on all fours like real hounds. Dogs and children alike were buttoned into the same type of bristling protective coat the hunters wore. This garment consisted of hundreds of a kind of fir cone stitched onto fabric. In addition, many of the children wore light helmets adorned with fur and upstanding ears. It was hard to tell them from the true dogs. Their hands, their knees, their feet, were calloused and padlike. Many of them had sharp faces, as if in imitation of canine muzzles.

While the dog-pack cavorted and peered into the faces of their captives, the hunters were busy ransacking

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everything piled on the luggage trolley. The tourists had an unrivaled view of knees and scarred calves, and could listen to the harsh language of their captors. More hunters and dogs emerged from nowhere and ringed round them. Rain began to fall in ponderous drops.

Dulcifer pulled himself into a sitting position, arms folded over knees.

"They haven't killed us outright. What do you suppose they will do with us?"

"Depends on whether or not I've killed their chief," Takeido said. "They're looking into that now." He began laughing miserably until Constanza hushed him.

The rain fell more heavily. The chief had been carried off the road. They knew his position by the knot of hunters surrounding him. The sky was dark.

"Why don't those damned buses return for us?" Constanza asked. "I know those foolish hostesses, Sonya Rykznel, Bonni Fin, Pru Ganin. Why have they not become alarmed and turned back to look for us?"

Rain poured down their faces. They were already soaked to the skin. Water hissed and bubbled off the smooth surface of the road. They waited. Kordan hid his face in his hands.

"I am a mere Academician, not a leader. There is a great difference..."

"I have been thinking about what was said earlier," Burek spoke at last. "They regard us as protein. They will exploit us as food. They have no human values. After all, once a capitalist enemy, always a capitalist enemy. We are in a bad position. I remember an old saying, 'A man in a lion's den turns to wolves for friendship.'"

"If we return to the System, I shall put in a severe criticism," said Sygiek. "All these creatures should have been destroyed before the planet was opened to tourism. The Minister for Outourism must answer for this. The propaganda also was misleading. I would not have come here had I known the true state of affairs."

"Agreed," said Kordan. "Outourist is notoriously lax. All the same, my orders were disobeyed. Utopianist Takeido, you will be criticized for firing your flare-gun without permission."

The rain plastered their hair against their foreheads. The dogs whined and slunk ceaselessly about them.

Takeido brushed moisture from his face and glared across at Kordan. "Academician Kordan, I tell you now, just in case they set the hounds on us in a minute or two and we are torn to bits, I don't give a cuss for you or your stupid authority. When we met in the hotel, I thought you were a great and wise man. Now I have a contempt for you. We are fifty light years from the System, so forget about it, forget the System! It's only a prison, with your kind as jailers. Right, Vul Dulcifer?"

Dulcifer shrugged his shoulders. "But you are so like them, Ian Takeido — always appealing to someone else for support. In the world in which we are forced to live, each individual has to guard his own heart."

"What do you say, Mystery Man, Che Burek?" asked Takeido, wiping rain impatiently from his lips. "Have you a similarly feeble answer to Utopianist Dulcifer's? Or a rustic saying of no marked relevance? Or are you a se-

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cret member of the USRP?"

Constanza's hand went to her lips. "Don't speak like that, Ian!"

"I say that we are not dead yet, and that there may still be hope if we cease quarreling with each other. Remember the old saying, 'When the frogs croak loudest, the crane strikes.'" Burek illustrated with a hard hand jabbing sharply toward the freeway. "You are young, Ian Takeido. You don't understand that rain isn't the only way of getting wet."

"You men are fools," Sygiek said, glaring with contempt over the spiked backs of hounds. "You in particular, Takeido. Do you imagine for one moment that because you are out of the System that the system is out of you? We are its products, stamped with it through and through, as much shaped by it as these degenerate barbarians are by their environment."

"I couldn't have uttered a harsher criticism of you myself," said Takeido.

Still the rain dropped down, filling the air with liquid sound. The landscape appeared to dissolve in water. Hunters, dogs, and children kept up their ceaseless activity, milling over the area, always maintaining watch in all directions. At length, the hunter chief was helped to his feet. He shook his spear above his skull-crowned head. A cheer went up, the dogs barked and whined.

At the same time, as if the two events were connected, the downpour tapered off sharply. One of the zebras was kicked to its feet and the chief mounted unaided. Again a cheer arose. He pointed toward the six prisoners.

More activity, more yapping from dogs and children. The tourists were made to rise to their feet. They stood dripping and dashing the last of the rain from their eyes. Willing hands pulled them down from the road, splashing through muddy water toward the spot where the chief waited.

A long pole was brought. Hempen ropes appeared. The six were lashed to the pole in a row, with hands secured behind their backs so that they could only proceed forward in line abreast. To add to their humiliation, packs of provisions and some of the looted articles from the luggage trolley were strapped to their shoulders so that they became beasts of burden as well as prisoners.

While this was happening, hunters and hounds alike were disappearing into the waterlogged countryside, into gulleys and scrub. Before they knew it, the forlorn knot of Utopians was again alone with its original five assailants.

VII

A harsh order was given. The six captives were made to march forward, yoked like oxen, into the semi-desert. Yellow mud splashed about their ankles with every step. Their heads were down and they moved for a long while in silence.

"The rain will never fertilize this ground," said Takeido. "I would love to do some soil-analysis. You would expect to find an almost total absence of micro-organisms. No doubt that was why the crops failed when the colonists first crash-landed here. Vital links in the chain of life have yet to form. What a rotten planet to pick to land on."

"Within a minimum of terraform-

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ing, this could be a good planet," replied Dulcifer. Nobody else said anything. With their heads bent and the difficulties underfoot, they felt disinclined for conversation.

"We'll turn this into an endless carpet of wheat in a century," Dulcifer said. Nobody answered him.

Time passed. The tourists lost account of it in their increasing weariness. Their minds grew blank as every step became an effort. They gazed down at their muddied feet in dull animal pain.

Abruptly, their captors made them change direction and halt behind a pile of boulders crowned by ferns. The hunters dismounted, whereupon their steeds fell to the soggy ground as if dead. One hunter stood guard while the other four vanished rapidly among nearby boulders.

Minutes later, a terrible squealing sounded, followed by a deep silence. When the hunters reappeared, each held the leg of an ungainly creature swinging at arm's length between them. Laughing in triumph, they threw the carcass down by their captives.

In this creature, adaptation from the standard human form had been carried to an amazing degree.

It was truly four-legged. In death, the larger hind legs doubled under its lean belly. It otherwise resembled a boar. What had been separate digits in the front legs of its ancestors had through usage become welded into horny hooves.

Eyes unwinking in death, it glared up at the downcast faces of the humans. Two small tusks, adaptations of canine teeth, curled outward from the upper jaw, raising the upper lip into a sneer. It was covered in short bristles and even boasted a short tail. Yet the horror lay not in its resemblance to an animal but in its resemblance to a man.

With businesslike speed, the hunters hammered a spiked pole through the boar's body from anus to mouth and balanced it on their shoulders. Using kicks and curses, they drove the panting zebras to their feet. Then they kicked the prisoners from their lethargy. The procession got under way again. The ground dried underfoot.

As the hours passed, the enforced march began to go harder with the prisoners. Their feet hurt, every muscle in their legs ached, the chafing of the pole on their shoulders became intolerable. They moaned for water and rest.

The day was well eroded before they were allowed another halt. For the last two hours, they had been moving steadily uphill, winding a painful way over graveled slopes. As soon as they were permitted to stop, they fell to the ground in the same manner as the zebras.

Liquid noises caught their attention.

They came to observe that they were lying by a pool of water set amid rock. A stream ran invitingly into the pool. Pebbles gleamed under the surface, little fish fled or meditated on impossible missions. Freshwater shrimps toyed with freedom only a few centimeters from their eyes.

The hunters drank first, then their zebra-mounts. Finally the prisoners were allowed to drink and dunk their burning heads and shoulders in the cool liquid. While they lay groaning, one of the hunters came with a flint

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knife and cut their bonds, so that they were free of the pole. Frugally, he gathered up the rope, stowing it away while they massaged their limbs.

Sygiek looked about. Behind them, to the west, a sullen glory was gathering in the low clouds. The planet lay beneath the clouds, rumpled and meaningless. Of course there was no sight of the road. And the silence was the silence of a continent unready for life.

Constanza crawled to Sygiek's side. "I'm sure that the other buses have returned and rescued the rest of our party by now. Do you think they'll be able to track us across this wilderness?"

"They don't have to follow on land. There are flycraft and matboats in Peace City that will search us out."

"Of course, but nobody would ever see us from the air in this sort of country. Besides, it will be getting dark soon."

"Infra-red will soon detect us, by day or night."

"Utopianist Sygiek, the question is whether they will be in time, isn't it? These primitive beings have very different attitudes to females from true men. Atavistic, repulsive. I heard a few disgusting tales from women who worked on building the road and I don't mind telling you I'm scared about our possible fate. You know what I mean — some nauseating mass sexual experience."

Sygiek laughed and patted her arm. "Don't worry about that. We certainly don't look very attractive at the moment, do we?"

Constanza glanced down at her breasts and pulled her stained uniform together. "It's not so much the look as the shape, I believe."

Easing his way to Dulcifer, Kordan said, "You see that line of hills ahead? They must be taking us there, presuming they need to be home by nightfall. Can you make out caves in the cliff-face? These savages are probably troglodytes. This might be our last chance to escape. Do you feel like making a break for it and running back to the bus?"

"No."

"No, nor do I. I can hardly move another pace."

Flat on his stomach, Dulcifer looked cautiously about. The hunters were sitting relaxedly nearby, talking among themselves. Kordan lay next to him; the others were also grouped about the pool: Burek, Takeido, then the two women. Catching Burek's eye, he reached down into the pool and took a fair-sized stone in his fist. He motioned to the others to do the same. With the exception of Kordan, they all chose a stone.

They lay as if dead, letting the water ripple over their flesh.

The hunters had come to a decision. Two of them set their spears down and walked briskly over to their captives. They gave a hoarse command. When there was no response, they kicked out at exposed flanks.

As Dulcifer felt the sandal on his calf, he turned, grasped the hunter's leg, and flung him down to the ground. While his opponent was falling, he brought up his right arm and struck with the stone. Dulcifer had over-estimated his reserves of strength — he missed the hunter's skull and caught

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him on the chin. The hunter fell heavily but instantly counter-attacked and had Dulcifer by the throat before he could strike a second time. The stone was wrenched from his grasp and flung away.

The other tourists fared no better. Constanza and Sygiek dragged a second hunter down between them but did not manage to still his furious struggles. He called for help. The other hunters came over at a run. Burek met them bravely, with Takeido giving rather hesitant support, but in no time they were flat on the ground. Takeido nursed a bleeding lip. The struggle was over.

"You have some rotten ideas, Comrade Dulcifer," Takeido said. "I'm disillusioned with you, too, if you wish to know."

"You fools!" cried Kordan. "You will get us all killed. Why don't you obey orders?"

A hunter kicked him savagely in the back, and he sprawled with his companions. He lay there miserably while Sygiek stroked his shoulder.

They were secured again. Their wrists were tied painfully behind their necks. This time, the pole was dispensed with.

"Well, at least we tried. It's obvious their intention is not to slit our guts out," said Dulcifer.

As they prepared to move forward, more natives materialized from the rocks.

The newcomers were not of the hunter caste. Their faces were unpainted. They wore no barbed coats; their one garment was a kind of loin cloth, concealing their genitals. About their heads, their hair fanned out in extraordinary fashion, so as to resemble a kind of helmet. In their leather belts were small clubs or hammers. They crowded around the captives in curiosity, prodding and laughing, but the hunters made them keep their distance. They were given the spitted boar to carry.

"Culturally speaking, this is a valuable experience," said Kordan.

The ground crumbled underfoot as they climbed toward the cliffs. There was no grass to bind the soil. Every step was a labor. The captives were panting heavily before they were stopped again. They had arrived at the cliffs. They had arrived at a settlement.

Between the newcomers and the cliffs ran a swift river, spanned by a rough wooden bridge. At cave-mouths in the cliff, warriors sat relaxedly on watch. These warriors called a greeting to the hunters, the chief of whom gave a triumphant cry in return.

The bridge was guarded by sentries, and by an elaborately carved pole, with bogey-man faces set one above the other, grimacing hideously at new arrivals. The sentries wore similar masks, carved from wood. They waited without impatience.

As they rested, Takeido said to Constanza, "It is hard to realize this is actually happening. It shows up a bad flaw in the System."

"What will become of us?" sighed Constanza. "These people are utterly inhuman. Wearing masks ... it's absurd and revolting."

"If we knew the truth," replied Burek, "we would probably admire the heroism of this group of savages. They

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are the descendants of the original colonists who have managed to stay human, or more or less human, while all the others have gradually deteriorated into beasts. That's 1.09 million E-years of bittersweet struggle for survival! I am in part glad to be here, for to me the tale of Lysenka II, if it can ever be fully told, is a fable of triumph as well as horror."

For him it was a long speech, but Sygiek would have nothing of it.

"On the contrary, it is a tale of degradation," she said. "Think how much progress we have made on Earth in the equivalent time, not the least in surviving nine ice ages and rationalizing the irrational."

Dulcifer touched her arm. "It would be rational to accept both Burek's view and your own. Let's keep an open mind and we may yet escape. You're a strong character and you can do that. I admire the way you speak out, but I counsel tact."

She gave him a shy smile.

Despite his weariness, Kordan turned to Dulcifer, saying sharply, "The way in which you assume a relationship between Millia Sygiek and yourself is incorrect. We are well aware that you come from Iridium City, but the closeness you adopt is improper. Please restrain yourself."

Dulcifer said, "I'm sorry it upsets you. Relationships don't come at our beck and call. Even Biocom hasn't made us that rational."

Sygiek hung her head, aware that his words had unexpectedly brought tears to her eyes. She looked surreptitiously around at her companions, filthy and abject, at the alien hunters, painted to look alarming, at the wooden masks of the sentries, at the whole meager tan scene.

Ignoring Kordan, she said to Dulcifer, "A sudden recollection. Why should I remember that? Of course I was an exobirth, brought up for my first ten years in the creche of the country town of Akrakt. I was always in trouble. I had no friends among all the hundreds of my siblings. The machines used to down-rate me and I was punished. I spent many hours alone in the dormitory during the day, just looking out of the window. Outside was an old peach orchard. I don't know why I tell you this."

"Well, let's find out," said Dulcifer. "Go on."

"There was some local planning dispute, I believe. So the old peach orchard remained at the back of the creche. I thought the neglected trees very beautiful. There were two women who worked in the creche, prole women. They were large and shapeless. One, I remember, had black hair which was tied to hang down her back like a horse's tail. They liked to walk in the derelict orchard. I must once have known their names. I used to envy the women. They walked so close, heads together, talking, half-smiling. How I used to wonder if they were sisters, and what they talked about...

"And they would stand under the trees and lift their fat bare arms and pluck the golden fruit. They used to gather it in their arms and eat with the juice running down their chins, laughing. Not pleasant, really — but to me then, as a lonely child, so pleasant, so very pleasant. They were so happy and

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in such communion. Do you see what I mean?"

"You should have called to them," Dulcifer said. "They would have liked your company. They would have given you peaches."

"I never had the courage to call to them. I kept my window closed."

"It's hard to ask for what we want most, isn't it?" He regarded her almost shyly.

She kicked the ground at her feet and did not reply.

They had halted at the bridge to allow the chief hunter to transfer his capture officially to the sentries. The spitted boar went first. The transaction took place as a slow ceremony. The commander of the sentries, a sturdy man with bow legs and a head thrust forward from rounded shoulders, gave a salute of thanks. The chief returned it, touching the skull on his head. Then the prisoners were prodded across the bridge. The hunters stayed on their own side, stiff and watchful. The handing-over ceremony had had elements of ritual about it.

As they crossed the bridge, Takeido looked back and gave the chief a mocking salute of farewell. The chief did not respond.

So they arrived under the towering cliff, its face pocked with entrances. From one hole, a stream gushed, falling free to splash among rocks and feed the river. Ladders led to the other holes. There was very little activity, the sentries at the cave-mouths always excepted. In the greying light, the place presented a dismal appearance; to the Utopians, accustomed to their graceful pyramidal cities, it looked like a rats' warren, awaiting extermination.

The prisoners' bonds were cut. They were driven by the sentries to climb one of the ladders. It was about seven meters high, and groaned and swayed as they climbed. A guard at the top hauled them one by one into the mouth of the cave.

VIII

They were made to squat at the entrance of the cave, as if in preparation for a long wait.

They had the outside world to sit and look back on as they rested. An uncomforting place it was: the ruinous landscape was now loaded with grey; it was that time of evening when the brightness in the sky merely accentuated the darkness gathered on the ground. The hunters who had captured them were allowed over the bridge. As they trundled across, round-shouldered and no longer alert, the chief removed the skull from his head to swing it at arm's length with a thumb hooked in one eyesocket.

A pack of mongrels was unleashed to patrol the cliff-foot; the melancholy howling of the creatures reinforced a general desolation.

Yet, forbidding as it was, all this formed part of a world the captives knew. As such, it appeared desirable in comparison with the dark warrens into which the tunnel behind them led. Noises and odors were wafted to them from that direction on a clammy wind; none was appealing.

"You don't need reminding that we are in deep trouble," said Kordan, speaking in a low voice. "Without consulting me, you attacked the guards

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and were inevitably defeated. Such undisciplined behavior has lessened our chance of reaching any form of agreement with these savages. What you hoped could be gained, I can't imagine."

It was the youngest member of the party, Ian Takeido, who answered him. "Without disrespect, Utopianist Kordan, that is exactly your problem — being unable to imagine. Imagination is necessary for control of the outside world." He closed his eyes tightly as he spoke. "When any new thing is presented to our senses, it is only with the aid of imagination that we can appreciate to which value-group it belongs and rank it accordingly. Reason alone is not sufficient. I daresay you would agree with me there, Che Burek?"

"To put it bluntly, no," said Burek. "I think you are a bit of an intellectual prig, comrade, and I can't see that imagination will get us home."

"He's not a prig!" exclaimed Constanza, putting an arm defensively around Takeido. "Even if he does say some indiscreet things."

"Perhaps, Utopianist Takeido, you will be good enough to imagine us back to the safety of Unity," Kordan said, smiling thinly as if in pain.

"Imagination is not a trick but a principle of life," Takeido answered, biting at his knuckles. "What we should determine, while there is time, is to what category these creatures belong."

"That's intellectual rubbish," said Burek. "Remember the old saying, 'It doesn't matter if the honey does not forgive the bear.' The point is that *they* decide in which category *we* belong — protein category, most likely." He leaned back contentedly against a rock, folding his arms.

"That sort of defeatist answer proves my point," said Takeido, his eyebrows moving rapidly up and down with nervousness. "Our image of these savages has been *ad hoc* all along. First, as animals, then as capitalists, now as cannibals. I'm sorry you choose to disagree with me and insult me, Utopianist Burek, because in fact I take my cue from something you said when we were waiting at the bridge, about the story of Lysenka II being, not a story of defeat, but a fable of triumph. If only our imagination will permit us to encompass a few millennia, we may perceive that these beings are in a super-category above animal, capitalist, cannibal, a super-category not unlike our own. They also are trapped on an alien planet — a planet that can never cease to remain alien however long they or their descendants exist here. So we can find common cause with them. We *all* need to get off Lysenka II. With that cause established — and communication must be possible — we become allies rather than enemies and can negotiate with them. In exchange for our freedom, the system agrees to settle Lysenka's human tribes on Earth."

Sygiek clapped her hands. "Brilliant deductions. I said reason was needed."

"Brilliant imagination," said Kordan. "And nothing more. We have been accustomed all our life to what you call negotiation; it is our directing principle. Do you think these barbarians, on their uncompromising world, will understand such a concept? I

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doubt it! For them, it must inevitably be a quick meal today rather than rescue next year."

"You will accept nothing you do not think of yourself," said Constanza angrily.

Dulcifer and Sygiek remained outside the discussion which then took place. He put his arm around her blistered shoulder and she leaned against his comforting bulk. After a while, he said in her ear, "When we attacked the hunters at the pool, why did you not use your gun? You could have killed all five of them. I'm sure killing is not against your principles as it is Kordan's."

"Yes, I would have used the gun," she said, so quietly that he alone could hear. "Only I do not possess it any more. I must have lost it — or somebody stole it from me."

They sat and looked at each other. He dropped his gaze first, sighing wearily. Then he looked up again, grinned, and said "Peach trees!"

From the gloom of the tunnel, three savages emerged. One collected the boar from the custody of the guards, shouldered it, and disappeared again, bent double. The other two carried staves with which they prodded the prisoners to their feet. They bowed with an uncouth courtesy before searching them. This search was carried out perfunctorily.

"We wish to go before your praesidium," said Kordan. "We have no intention of harming you. Do you understand?"

The guards took no notice. They saluted the sentries at the tunnel mouth and motioned with their staves for the tourists to walk before them into the darkness. Constanza clung to Takeido as they went, for it was wet underfoot. Cold drops of water came winging down from the roof and splashed over their heads. Shelves of fungi grew on outcrops of rock to one side. They staggered along unsurely.

Somewhere ahead, a dim light burned. At closer quarters it proved to be a rough lamp, either of stone or pottery, marking a sharp bend in the tunnel. Past the bend stood a wooden stockade. The gate in the middle of the stockade was closed from the inside. Sentries in helmets looked curiously down at the prisoners from a platform set behind the barrier. No move was made to open the gate.

"Now what are we waiting for?" Sygiek demanded of the escort. She received no answer. The escort stood impassively, letting water drip over their skulls and down their cheeks.

Sygiek shivered. She was tired and cold. On the gate of the stockade was emblazoned one of the bogey-man faces. She turned away from it in loathing and said to Kordan, "Why don't they answer me? They have a language."

He laid a hand affectionately on her arm. "They will have their instructions. They may attach some significance to waiting before entrances which means nothing to us. If they have been told not to speak, they do not speak. For all our respect for language, you and I would do the same. Looking at these creatures, I can't help thinking about this whole amazing paradox of the recession of the Lysenkan colonists into kinds of animal. I believe that language is the key to the mystery."

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"Why do you say 'amazing paradox?' Without suitable structured social context, people decline. That's a truism."

Standing huddled together in the semi-darkness as they were, any conversation tended to become general. Constanza unexpectedly agreed with Sygiek. "Quite so. The organization withers, the individual is left. Then anarchy follows. The Lysenkan menagerie forms a perfect illustration of the truth of system doctrine."

Kordan shook his head. "Without wishing to argue against doctrine, I must point out that it was inevitably by breaking new ground, by forming new tribes, new tongues, new societies, that *homo sapiens* developed in the first place. Let me explain that such a reversion from manhood to animalhood as we witness on Lysenka runs contrary to evolutionary law as explicated by K.V. Hondaras over two hundred years ago. That is why I speak of a paradox." He paused and then said, hesitantly, "Accepting official explanations, I could scarcely believe that the colonists could have degenerated into those various forms we saw with our own eyes."

They fell silent, listening to the water drip into the mud underfoot, until Constanza said, "Did you believe that what you saw was some kind of propaganda trick?"

Takeido said, "Excuse me, but the means of evolution are well understood. Duplicate genes provide spare copies in which changes can be accumulated. For an alien strain on Lysenka, changes would be rapid, and the human stock would respond rapidly to natural selection. Where's your difficulty?"

"Ah, but what of social selection? These people we're talking about may have been capitalists but they had comparatively high social organizations. For pre-Utopian days." Kordan hesitated, then plunged in as if deciding that he must talk. "We have spoken all along of these unfortunates in terms of *function*, as protein-eaters, or capitalists, or colonists. But when their starship crash-landed here, they were bereft of function in that sense. They became passive, malleable, in an evolutionary sense. Reduced to bare existence, they would have been forced by the sterility of Lysenka II to spread out thinly in order to survive on what food there was, digging roots, picking berries, searching for insects under stones. They would be Gatherers, not Hunters, at first. I can imagine that it would take only one generation for them to revert to complete primitivism. Those who could not or would not revert would die off."

Burek grunted. "Or hold the ship and its supplies against all comers and survive that way."

"A wasting asset," said Dulcifer.

"As the teat grows thinner, the kid sucks with greater vehemence," Burek replied.

The sentries had disappeared from the top of the stockade, but still there was no move to open the gate. The prisoners leaned against the damp rock walls, and Kordan said, "Let me make my point, please. Degeneration is not the same as mutation. How did these people become animal? By renouncing their humanity: an involuntary process. And how was that done? Because they lost the one basic art which makes us

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homo uniformis and which made them human, the art of language. From his animal forebears, *homo sapiens* inherited the frozen vocabulary of instinct and developed it over the millennia into a complex mode of expression whereby he could control, firstly, himself, and then the world. Expression. What does language express? Language is transitive. Between total language and the nature of the cosmos lies a close relationship; indeed, according to Hondaras, mind is the high point of cosmos, and man the expression of its emergent characteristic. Mind's vehicle is language. In the End will be only the Word."

Sygiek said, "Despite the orthodoxy of K.V. Hondaras's work, this speculation is still contentious."

"We rightly label all speculation contentious," Kordan replied. "Yet here and now we are forced into a speculative posture. What is sure is that the stranded colonists were faced with disorientation, complete mental disorientation. Time was wrong; the earth failed them. They would have run up against an immutable law which all societies prefer to forget as they become sophisticated: that there is not only no civilization but practically no basis for life where there are no crops. Those tragic colonists planted their grain. It rotted in the ground. Fertilizers had no effect. The land, the time, was against them."

He stared up at the distant roof of rock. It was barely visible in the gloom. Only one or two stalactites showed, like distorted stars.

"No doubt they turned to magic when science failed. Magic and incantation take us back to the roots of language and the power of repetition. But magic also failed. The cosmos was shown to be defective."

Dulcifer had been leaning against the tunnel wall, scarcely bothering to listen to the talk. Now he seized on a point that Kordan had made earlier. Wiping the moisture from his face, he looked closely at the other and asked, "Which are you going to believe, then, Kordan? The official line as laid down by K.V. Hondaras, or the evidence of your own eyes?"

"It is a test, isn't it? Perhaps that's why this planet is closed to all but the privileged. It's a world which doesn't fit into our system. Perhaps that's why it's *open* to the privileged — they can be tested..."

Then Kordan looked around and said no more, gnawing anxiously at his lower lip.

"Aren't you going to give me an answer, you who are so fond of answers?" said Dulcifer, mockingly. "Put it into language for us. 'Never think what cannot be said.'"

"Are you a provocateur or something? Leave him alone," Burek said, giving Dulcifer a shove. "Maybe Kordan prefers not to say what cannot be thought. What he tells us is interesting, as far as I understood it, and I don't see why philosophy should cover all contingencies of reality, else philosophy and reality would be indistinguishable — and plainly that was never intended."

"Who's to say what's intended any more?" Takeido muttered. They stood there in the mud, occasionally lifting a foot. At last the bolts on the stockade

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gate were withdrawn, and the escort stepped smartly forward to drive its party through. Once they were in, the gate was closed behind them.

Mud still lay thick underfoot, though there was an encouraging light ahead. Planking and logs had been laid in the mud. From this main tunnel, side tunnels branched. As they went ahead again, picking their way, the darkness became less intense. At last, the tunnel opened into a large chamber, which was well lighted. To one side of this chamber, a cage built of wood had been set up. The guards forced their prisoners into the cage and secured it shut.

IX

Trapped under the epidermis of an alien planet; surrounded by a savage species the more terrible for resembling men, threatened by all manner of fates, the six weary Utopians enjoyed the luxury of Biocom: they controlled their thoughts and allowed their unified nervous systems to calm them. There was room in the cage for them all to sit, and it was dry. So they sat down, rested, and awaited events.

When their eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, they gained a better impression of the cavern to which they had been brought. It was lit by a few flambeaux standing out from the rock at intervals, and by a fire which burned on a stone in the middle of the enormous space. There were two other, much dimmer, sources of light.

Firstly, on the far side of the cavern, a hole overhead gave a glimpse of the sky. In the general confusion of shadows and structures which filled the area, this hole was not immediately apparent. Once they perceived it, the prisoners realized with dismay that the outside world was almost as dark as the world inside, and that Lysenka II was already turning toward its lengthy night period.

Secondly, also on the far side of the cavern, a large building stood. Upon the steps of this building, a number of candles burned, casting the shadows of its columns into the interior. The building was circular in ground plan, and roofless. Its elegance set it at variance with the general roughness of its surroundings. Between its colonnades, a shadowy metal mass could be observed, as well as a ladderlike structure pointing to the hole in the roof above. Puzzle as they might, the prisoners could not make out the function of this building, although, as time passed, a number of savages took up candles from the steps, went inside, and paraded formally around.

When the small patch of sky was entirely dark, many more people entered the cavern. They came in quietly, and paraded in little groups. All were roughly clad. There were babies and small children among them, none of whom uttered a sound. The cave-dwellers flocked in from various entrances. Opposite the cage was a tunnel mouth, down which the flow of torches could be seen for some while before their bearers reached the central chamber.

The company made a slow promenade of the cavern, each group halting when it got to the cage to look in at its inhabitants. Instinctively, the Utopians rose to their feet and stared back. The cave-dwellers appeared reserved, even respectful, but their dark faces were ex-

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pressionless. Then they moved on, and went through complicated charades, almost as if performing a dumb-show; the meaning of this performance was lost on the watchers.

Following the dumb-show came a massed entrance into the far building. The cave-dwellers could be seen among the pillars, rubbing the complex metal structures with their hands. There were strange cries. Gongs and trumpets sounded.

After this ceremony, the atmosphere became more relaxed. Family groups assembled around the central fire. An aged woman in a flowing gown emerged from the shadows and related, with plentiful gesture, what sounded like a long dull story.

"The father and the mother perform sexual intercourse, after which the child is born from inside the mother's body," said Burek, looking up from a reverie. "I saw a reconstruction of the event in a visionshow, and it must have been extremely painful, except that, as the saying has it, 'The cow expects nothing but what happens to cows.' You see these primitives also keep their children with them because they have no experts to teach them to grow adult properly, as with us. The whole science of adoleschematics has not been invented as far as these wretches are concerned."

"Some of them are eating now," said Constanza. "At least we are not on their menu tonight. Rescue must arrive by morning. Why are the squads taking so long?"

From a side tunnel, platters of steaming food were emerging, carried by women in aprons. They were accompanied by a man with a big bag slung about his belly. He took tokens of some kind from everyone who accepted food. The watchers could not understand the meaning of this.

Takeido sniffed. "Cooking smells good. Do we get any?"

"Inevitably, they are eating animal or else their fellows," said Kordan. "Such a diet would make us ill."

"I would try it," said Takeido. "Terror makes you hungry. I must eat or sit and scream."

"I have eaten animal and come to no harm," said Dulcifer. Sotto voce, he added in Sygiek's ear, "And I fancy you had to do so as part of your USRP training."

She silenced him by putting her fingers over his mouth.

When the food scraps were being cleared away, the comparative quiet of the cavern was broken by the entry of capering animals.

Two of them rushed in, followed by cave-dwellers which whips, which they cracked vigorously. These animals were immediately recognizable as carnivores. The shape of their skulls was predetermined, not by cortical development, but by the large lower jaw, to which the rest of the head appeared subordinate. Fearsome fangs were in evidence, as the creatures snarled at their tormentors. Their bodies were lean, most of the musculature and weight going into shoulders, forelegs and hindlegs. For all their animality, and their spotted hide, the basic human form was apparent — most apparent when they pranced on their hindlegs. Garments had been tied around their necks and on their heads by their tor-

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mentors, increasing the effect of cruel parody.

The leopardlike animals were driven around in a circle by their tormentors. The onlookers, sitting cross-legged with their children, clapped their hands and chanted monotonously. The chant rose to a crescendo. Gongs sounded again. With strange automatic gestures, the tormentors dropped their whips, drew long swords and rushed in on the animals. Crying piteously, the leopards tried to escape. Their hindlegs had been shackled. After one or two thrusts they collapsed, writhing, and their bodies were seized and lifted high. Blood flowed. More chanting.

Everyone rose. The killers led a procession around the whole cavern area and then into the pillared building. They fell silent.

A tall man dressed in what aspired to be a uniform, with gloves, long boots, and a transparent helmet over his head, appeared from the darkness at the rear of the temple. He stood silent while the dead beasts were laid upon the stone before him. He dipped his hand in their blood. Then he strode over to the shadowy blocks of metal, where several attendants, also dressed in vestigial uniforms, waited. All began to rub and prod the arrangement of rods and casings. The audience took up a low chant.

The tall man walked to a chair placed beside the metal arrangement. Drums began to throb. Their beat grew more deafening. The tall man pulled a lever. Faster beat the drums. The seat tipped back, turning into a couch. The drums thundered, the audience screamed at the top of their lungs. Back went the couch, up went the arm of the rider. The noise died to a whisper, the ghost of a whisper. The finger on the end of the arm pointed up, up into the murk, to the patch of open sky. The clouds had rolled away.

In that patch of sky, one star burned.

The ceremony was suddenly over. The magic was done. The tall man climbed from his couch. Children started crying and running amid the throng, as everyone began to go home.

"I never thought to see ..." Kordan said. "Ritual ... it was a primitive *ritual* — forms of conduct fixed and repeated, the satisfaction of pattern reinforcing lifestyle."

"You could be right," said Dulcifer. "I've watched Venusian desert-skimmers performing the same meaningless acts over and over. Presumably they reinforce the image of themselves as desert-skimmers that way."

"Why should they put on such a performance for us?" asked Sygiek.

"There you show your lack of that imagination I spoke of before we came in here," said Takeido excitedly. "They are doing it for themselves — we don't come into it. Not yet. I believe Kordan to be substantially correct. I had forgotten the word even: *ritual.* Performing the same acts over and over, reinforcing an image. Man's distant ape ancestors on Earth may have had to perform such meaningless acts over many generations before they became human."

"But these are not meaningless acts, Ian Takeido," said Kordan. "For us, certainly not for them. Now I ask *you* to exercise your imagination. Imagine that capitalist ship over one million years ago. Imagine its survivors

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forced into various ecological niches in order to survive, losing language and human identity. How many creatures have spread and multiplied across Lysenka, surviving the impoverished Devonian? Several million? I don't know. But we have the evidence of our eyes that one of those unfortunate groups — and it may be small, may consist of no more than a couple of hundred individuals — has managed to maintain its humanity more or less intact, using hierarchy and ritual to reinforce its distinctness from the creatures on which it must prey."

"You speak almost with compassion, Jerezy Kordan," said Burek.

"It's no good being sympathetic to these monsters, Utopianist Kordan," said Constanza. "They certainly aren't sympathetic to us. If they don't rape or kill us tonight, they will in the morning. They are animals. They have not fed us. They have not given us water. Soon we're going to have to use this cage as a latrine, which is disgusting.

"Even if what you say is true, and personally I don't give a fig what happened in the past, you are only talking about an extension of the illegal capitalist system, aren't you? Surely our basic Utopian beliefs are put to the test right here. If all the rest of the colonists went under and just this human group survived to prey on the rest, then these are the exploiter class, the bourgeoise rabble of Lysenka, and there is more reason to eliminate them than all the rest. Here is the ideological enemy. When we are rescued, they will all be shot."

Silence fell.

"An unexpected speech from you, Comrade Constanza," said Burek, in his deep, rather mocking voice.

"Oh, I know you think I'm just a fool. I think that you are one more elitist bore, Utopianist Burek, and I'm vexed that I am now forced to make water in your presence. Turn your backs, all of you."

The cavern had emptied except for two forlorn bent figures, extinguishing candles on the far steps. The crowd had disappeared into side-tunnels, stumbling off to sleep out the long Lysenkan night. The six prisoners sat in their cage.

In a minute, Kordan began speaking again. His voice trembled at first. "I know I am a poor leader. Equally, you are poor followers. Our situation is unparalleled. I see that Rubyna Constanza is ideologically correct. I also see that Ian Takeido is right. We have to think in more than one context, and that is always uncomfortable; inevitably, such is often my duty as historian.

"By the way, I must apologize if my earlier remarks about language failure causing evolutionary breakdown sounded unorthodox. I did speak unguardedly. I was thinking out what I would say when I got back to the Academy...

"We must sometimes look beyond our necessary vigilance against enemies of the system. What we have witnessed here, I believe, is a ritual which dates back to that seminal event in the generation of these debased creatures: an attempt to get their damaged ship off this planet and back into space. Over the ages, that ambition lost its force; urgency has become ceremony; the meaning is now in the means; but the

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means reinforces their besieged sense of identity. Though the idea of space travel has dwindled to no more than a religion, that religion helps them remain human."

"Remain capitalists, you mean," said Constanza, with contempt.

"Religion!" exclaimed Takeido. "That's the word I was after. Jaini Regentop mentioned religion. It means a kind of faith. We have just witnessed a religious ceremony." His eyebrows twitched again. "Religion was another of those ancient enemies of the state. Before Biocom, the internal workings of man's nervous system were so confused — dating back as they did to his animal past — that he was haunted by spectres, one of which he dramatized as an external supernatural being of great power who ordered things randomly, to man's advantage or disadvantage. These people have reverted to that state of superstition."

"Well, it's no concern of ours," said Burek, dismissing the subject, and yawning. "I shall follow our sagacious little Constanza's example, and then try to sleep. May I suggest we all do the same?"

"There may be a way of using these — hypotheses to our advantage," said Sygiek, ignoring him and addressing Kordan. "If these religious or ritualistic ideas you advance are near the truth, then the question to ask is, do these brutes know that we are from another world? If so, what will their attitude to us be?"

"A proper question, Millia," said Kordan. "I already had it in mind. Tomorrow, we may get a chance to impress them. There could be a way of working on their superstitious nature to our advantage. We are weary now; as Che Burek says, it is best that we should sleep if we can and face tomorrow with fresh hope."

"Agreed," said Dulcifer. "At least as far as the bit about sleep goes. Hope must look after itself."

They settled down uncomfortably within the confines of their prison.

Sygiek allowed Dulcifer to put his arms about her as she curled with her blistered shoulders against the bars of the cage. Close against his ear, she whispered, "I sense a change in Kordan. He is in command of himself again. I believe he stole my gun. There was a moment when he tried to caress me after the bureaucrat Morits died — that was when he took it from me."

Dulcifer nodded without commenting. "Sleep, my darling," he said. "Think of ancient peach trees and fat bare-armed women and sleep."

The fires in the center of the cavern guttered in a clammy draught.

After the slow night, a slow day.

As soon as a faint grey light stole into the cavern, the cave-dwellers commenced various ritualistic attendances. Warriors came and went, blessed by minor dignitaries in the ceremonial building before proceeding further — presumably to hunt or patrol. Children were marshalled and taken through vigorous calisthenics. Women worked about the fires. The machine of the tribe was in action.

Food was brought early to the six captives. It came in a thick pottery bowl and consisted of a glutinous stew, with big chunks of meat lying in gravy. It

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steamed. There was also a large pitcher of water, which they passed around thankfully.

"We'd better eat," said Kordan. They stood staring down at the bowl, which he held out to them.

"Looks good," said Dulcifer. He dipped a hand in, brought up some meat and thrust it into his mouth. The others watched him with fascination as he chewed.

"Eat," he said. "Eat. It's only our friend of yesterday, the boar."

One by one, they dipped in. Only Constanza refused.

"You are cannibals," she said. "It is against our ethics to taste this muck."

"You'll be hungry," Takeido warned. "Although it is nauseating, we need food. Never mind ideology, let me feed you, Rubyna!"

"Heroes never say no," Burek quoted.

"It's not too bad," said Sygiek, dipping in a second time.

Constanza went and sat down at the far end of the cage. The others cleared the bowl between them.

They looked at each other with guilty smiles.

An aged crone brought another bowl. They cleared that too. Some water was left; after a brief debate, they washed their hands in it, and then emptied the pitcher on the floor. The crone brought a fresh pitcher, full of cold spring water. They said nothing. They drank till they gasped.

After the old woman had retrieved her pitcher, Sygiek went over to where Rubyna sat with Takeido.

"We must think positively," she said, looking down at the other woman. "Now that these savages have brought us underground, the chances of our being rescued by the forces from Peace City may be more remote than we have estimated. So it is required of us that we keep up our strength. You made a mistake not eating."

"Go away," said Rubyna, sulkily. "Just because you ate that muck, you needn't force it down everyone's throat."

"We do what the system expects us to do. We must remain strong. Surely you understand that?"

Rubyna jumped up, facing the other woman, the pupils of her dark eyes wide. "Just don't give me orders, Millia Sygiek! You've done nothing but boss people around ever since you got in my bus, and I'm sick of the sound of your voice."

Sygiek stepped back, saying in a controlled tone, "Just behave yourself, you little Outourist girl. Some are qualified to give orders, some to take them."

"Well you just make sure you know who is in which category before you open your big mouth again! I haven't forgotten that you called me a worker. When we get out of here, you're going to have a very nasty surprise — you and those two fools who hang around sniffing your sloppy-maos!"

"Stop it, Constanza, stop it! We mustn't fight," cried Takeido, pulling her back. "We've got enough trouble without being divided among ourselves." He ran his hands over her red tunic, cupping her breasts. She turned and stared at him, as Kordan pulled Sygiek away and soothed her at the

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other end of the cage.

More time passed. A group of men, eight in number, came from an inner tunnel and marched purposefully to the cage. The captives stood and looked at them.

One of the cave-dwellers was the leader, the rest his retinue. There was no mistaking his authority. He was short, middle-aged, long-haired, dressed in a red cloak which hung from a wooden yoke at his shoulders. He wore a leather helmet. His manner was brisk, and he silenced a mutter which began among his attendants. He addressed his captives in a clattering burst of speech.

"We do not understand what you say," Kordan answered, "but before there can be any communication between us, we wish to leave this cage. Open the door."

He rattled the bars to demonstrate his meaning.

The leader said something, the others muttered behind him. Guards were called, moving up briskly with staves.

After a curt gesture from the leader, one of his henchmen stepped forward with a key and unlocked the cage door. He flung it wide. The captives came forth, Kordan first, then Burek, then Sygiek and Dulcifer, then Takeido, and Constanza last.

"We demand an escort to the safety of Dunderzee Gorge," said Kordan. "We can offer you benefits in exchange. Do you understand?"

"They are hardly likely to understand, are they?" asked Sygiek.

"Very well, Millia — you put the message over to them in sign language."

Sygiek turned to Constanza in conciliatory fashion. "You should know, Rubyna, you live on this beastly world. Can anyone speak the language of these people?"

Rubyna turned a shoulder to the other woman as she replied.

"They are not people but animals. We shoot them to kill them, like other animals. It is not even proved that they have a language; Kordan said as much. We shall be rescued soon, and then they will all be shot. Exterminated."

The leader put a hand on Kordan's arm. Kordan shrank back, but the gesture, though imperious, was not hostile. He was motioning them to follow them.

They had little choice. Despite the courtesy, they were carefully watched by guards, who hemmed them in as they walked across the rough floor, past the central fires, toward the religious building. At the steps of the building, the leader halted to harangue them again. His eye burned fiercely upon them, he spoke with fervor. He pointed frequently upward, one finger stretching to the hole in the cavern roof, through which clouded sky was visible. Then he addressed himself to Sygiek, speaking intensely to her, pointing at her and at himself.

She studied him intently, deliberately not dropping her gaze, trying to divine, through centuries of divergence, what kind of man he was. All she saw was the dark surface of his eyes. He produced from his tunic a shard of glass. It was part of a broken mirror. He held it up to her so that she saw her own grey eyes, then he pointed to his own face.

"What theories do you have about

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this?" she asked the others.

"He is asking you to mate with him," said Takeido and sniggered.

"Maybe he had a daughter like you once," suggested Burek.

"He is commenting on facial similarities between our species and his," said Kordan.

"He is asking you to see that our kind and his are much alike," said Dulcifer, "and that you are much prettier than he is."

"He is going to cut your eyes out," said Constanza.

The question was not resolved. As if vexed, the leader made a signal with his left hand. The six were led up the steps and into the roofless building. As they passed, they saw men in robes making candles. They went closely by the two masses of metal, all veined with pipes and taps, and stepped under the great wooden framework which reached up to the open sky. Some way back, almost against the stone walls of the cavern, was a range of stalls. To these stalls they were lead.

Each booth contained a seat, long fetters attached two at each opposite wall, and little else. Despite protests, they were chained hand and foot.

"This is just a filthy prison!" groaned Takeido. "I can't take much more of this."

"There are worse prisons than this all over Earth," said Burek.

"For that remark you will be reported," said Sygiek, with something of her old fire. "*Our* places of confinement are part of an elaborate judicial system, and are designed for re-education."

"More to the point," said Kordan, "observe that we have been promoted. We are no longer caged like animals but like human beings. They must keep us captive, inevitably, but they have installed us in a sacred place. What is more, I believe the president is apologizing."

"Apologizing!" said Takeido. He buried his face in his hands and began to laugh softly.

Judging by the leader's soothing tone, he was attempting something like an apology. He clapped his hands. An object was brought and handed to Kordan. He examined it.

"It is a foil-page book," he said. "It has some diagrams, so perhaps it is a textbook. Inevitably the language is some antique capitalist tongue. I've never seen the hieroglyphs before. It's not the Cyrillic or the Germanic, both of which I can decipher. It could be American."

As he handed it carelessly back, he said, "Thanks. Impossible to read."

"I doubt if he can read it either," said Dulcifer. "It's just a relic."

"That does not matter," said Burek. "He tries to show you that he reveres something which comes from off this world. You don't imagine they turn out foil-page books in this damned cave, do you?"

The book was taken away, the leader made another brief speech, bowed, and withdrew, his retinue following.

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They were left alone for the rest of the day, except when the aged crone brought them separate bowls of a watery soup, tasting of mint. The hours passed slowly and the benches were

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hard. Although they were able to look about over the doors of the cells and over the low walls which divided them one from another, the hours crawled by with awful sloth. They speculated about rescue, knowing that they would be missed at Unity and Peace City by now. Maintaining official optimism became particularly difficult during the long stretches of the afternoon.

The order in which they sat in their cells was: Burek, Kordan, Constanza, Takeido, Dulcifer, Sygiek.

"I will tell you all what I feel and think," Takeido burst out, when silence had ruled them for a long while. "I know that to do so is frowned upon, is either in bad taste or often punishable, but after all we shall never get back to the System, that's clear. First of all, I wish that I was lying by the river, with Rubyna Constanza in my arms, making love to her with her naked body against mine. Excuse me, Rubyna, but that's my devout wish."

Constanza said nothing. She bit her little finger and looked down.

"When one wolf howls, he howls for the whole pack," Burek quoted. He laughed.

After more silence, Takeido said, "So much for my desires. Now for my intellect. This may be even more distasteful to you. I have little scientific knowledge beyond my own discipline of exobotany, but I have speculated more than I have ever revealed. What I say, though based on new experience, is founded on old meditation.

"All right. Our lofty comrade, Academician Jerezy Kordan, is an official historian, but I daresay we have all acquired a little history, despite the many prohibitions. After all, the elite knows how to bend its own rules, none better, eh? So. As I understand, the old *homo sapiens* from which we sprang was haunted by many ghosts, all concerned with the inherited imperfections of their governance systems. I mean that becoming human entailed, in evolutionary terms, adding new control systems to old. So there was some built-in conflict. This *homo sapiens* tried to explain in many ways throughout its history. A series of *meddlers* was invented, most of them external to man — projections, you might say — from inside to outside, for greater comfort for the uncomfortable *sapiens*. Gods, ghosts, fates, devils, elves, fairies, spirits, golems. All were meddlers. Great religious and philosophical systems were built in order to account for physiological discomforts, many of them holding sway over man's minds for hundreds of years. The projections showed more durability than did brief *homo sapiens* individuals.

"As time went on, *sapiens* gained more control over nature but no more over himself. He could enslave the elements but remained himself a slave.

"During this period, the more advanced sections of *sapiens* changed their projections. New models were made to conform with a more sophisticated world outlook. They embodied their discomforts into new metaphysical monsters — even into whole populated planets full of them. As we now know, such things cannot exist, but their imaginations were wild with discomfort. They also dreamed of perfect machines, things of metal which would not suffer from their internal disabili-

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ties. Robots, which we call radniks. Robots had only electronic circuits and no dreams, no interna! confusions. Dreams, I should explain, were discharges of short-circuited nervous energy, generated by the uncomfortable conflict of the internal systems, which disturbed *sapiens'* sleep and were almost as important as sleep.

"Their entire science, though few of them realized it, was in fact, incantatory, like the rituals we watched last night, designed to cast out the devils within. Eventually, they did design a perfect system. Of course, the prototype of a perfect political system had to come first, otherwise such experiments would have been forbidden by power-crazed governments.

"*Sapiens* did eventually see a way — through genetic engineering, and what we now term techno-eugenics — to breed men and women without their own discomforts, their physiological handicaps. This is what we were saying yesterday.

"They bred us.

"That way, they also generated their own downfall. *Uniformis* had to take over their chaotic world.

"Well, comrades, you know what has happened since. Or what has *not* happened since. We have forged slowly on ever since we were invented. We have gone on and on, generation after generation. The old world has slowly died under our touch. We still keep a few animals and, I believe, even a few *homo sapiens* in zoos. We are logical, and we understand the logic of controlling everything, from ourselves to the whole Solar System. Yet, apart from abolishing many *sapiens* features of life, like womb-birth and family and art and religion, what have we done? Nothing. Nothing. In a million years, we have in fact achieved less than *sapiens* achieved in a century or so."

"This is all rubbish," said Sygiek. "You are suffering from food poisoning."

"You would naturally think it so, but you can spout later if you wish, Utopianist Millia Sygiek," said Takeido smoothly. "I have listened to your sort, you damned radniks, spouting all my life. Now I'm going to have my turn. I just want to say that there is another point of view to be put, and in the System it can never be put. There's no way of putting it. Know what I mean, comrades? If you speak out, you are an enemy of the system. Is our way of life then so insecure? Can one question make a whole statement collapse?

"Maybe so — when you look at the little we have accomplished. True, there's our method of gulf travel which *sapiens* could never have developed, since cratocalcs is a form of math beyond their mentalities — and beyond mine, I must add. Yet for all that, *sapiens* would by now have ventured farther than we. A million years of Biocom, and all we've done is entrench ourselves in the System like woodlice in an old log!"

In a coldly controlled voice, Kordan said, "Utopianist, your mind is dark indeed — and you shall have thorough treatment if we leave here alive — if that pitiable ritual we witnessed last night can provoke such subversive ferment!"

"No! No! Yes, yes, my mind is dark, you stinking intellectual pig, because

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the system forces us all to be separate from one another in the cursed name of Unity!" Takeido was kneeling up on his bench now as far as the shackles would allow him, and shouting across Constanza's cell at Kordan, who faced him whitely. Constanza cowered and covered her ears. "We can't trust each other because of the constant fear of betrayal. What the state calls conscience is just a vile pattern of betrayal. We can't trust each other. I dare to speak now merely because trust and betrayal are irrelevant in these circumstances. But you're right, yes, that ritual last night did make a ferment in my breast."

He was choking with emotion as he struck himself on his chest, rattling his chains. "I thought of the *endurance* of these people, of how they still care for their young, for instance, instead of rearing them like laboratory animals as we do. They survive in impossible conditions. I'll tell you — I'll tell you all, you numb Utopians, I'll tell you, if a few hundred of *us* were set down on a deserted strip of Lysenka now, we should sit on our bottoms and talk and argue and bullshit until we perished. That would be our logic. We're just robots, radniks."

"Our talk is superior to their ritual," commented Burek. "Sit down, Takeido, sit down and shut up. Yours is an immature argument. You do no good to anyone."

Takeido broke out anew.

"Ha, you wouldn't support me, would you, Utopianist Burek? You are just an isolated individual posing as an individualist to retain some shred of self-respect. Yet you can neither give nor receive help — just the sort of puppet the system wants!" He twisted around the other way and shouted to Dulcifer. "And what about *you*, Vul Dulcifer? Do you support me? Every now and again you say little daring things! In our hearts we know why — yes, we know why! You're an agent provacateur, a member of the stinking rotten USRP! Don't bother to deny it. I'm not afraid to say what everyone has guessed."

"They've guessed wrong if so," said Dulcifer. "Sit down, comrade — we've got enough troubles without your adding to them."

"Yes, please sit down, Ian," said Constanza.

"I'll sit down," said Takeido. "I'll sit down because Rubyna asks me, and she's the only decent person here. I'll sit down, but first I'll tell you my great idea. It's a way we might break the impossible stranglehold that Biocom has on everyone in the System. I'll say it whether you support me or not.

"We should forget our carefully taught prejudices and see that these savages here are to be admired. Yes, admired! They should not be obliterated. We should see that they are preserved. More than that, they should be taken back, every last man, woman and child, and established in a large settlement on Earth or Mars. Not all the degenerate animal forms; simply those tribes — this one and any others like it — who have managed to retain their humanity over almost two million years in the face of impossible odds. I believe we need them. After a million stultifying years of World Unity, I believe we need *sapiens* as they once thought they

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needed us. That's all."

"That's quite enough," said Constanza, sharply. "You speak heresy. Sit down."

The tone of her voice deflated Takeido. He slumped back on his bench and said no more.

"There's much one could say," said Kordan. His voice died; he did not say it.

Nobody else spoke for a long while. Most of them drifted off to sleep. Only Sygiek sat upright, scarcely moving, looking ahead into the gloom of the cavern.

It was she who saw the beginning of the end of the day. The clouds parted overhead, the sky faded to pearl, and the cave-dwellers began to return to their warrens. More dead animals were brought in. Children began to run about. Priests moved again in the temple, candles were lit. Men marched in with torches, there were the sounds of voices, shouts. The fires were stoked and an aroma of cooking filled the air.

She turned and roused Dulcifer. One by one, the others stirred and sat up, groaning with discomfort.

Dulcifer looked over the cell wall at Takeido.

"Utopianist Takeido, despite your insults and exaggerations, I was interested in what you had to say about inadequacies of the System and our needing *homo sapiens.*"

"Forget it. I know what your interest is worth." Takeido would not look up.

"Your youthfulness makes you believe that because the system's only slowly forging ahead something is wrong. When you grow a good deal older, your beliefs will perform the same mirror-reversal that mine did; you will come to understand that it was *sapiens'* mad unchecked development which was the symptom of something wrong. I daresay that, as you claim, *sapiens* would have over-run half the galaxy by now. But remember what a mess they made of Earth! Don't get sentimental about them. Think what a mess they would have made of the galaxy. No, our cautious way is better.

"But I cannot hope to persuade you to my view any more than you can persuade me to yours; it is not argument which changes our minds on such matters, but time."

Takeido shook his head and looked at his manacled hands. In a low voice he said, "I suppose you are equally incapable of accepting the argument that we are in danger of becoming exactly the sort of robots that *sapiens* envisioned?"

When some seconds had passed, and Dulcifer did not reply, Kordan said, Whether or not we leave this cave alive, there is no reason why we should tolerate seditious discussion. The robots are living here, going through their numbjumbo every day and night. You find a hunting life exciting, no doubt, Takeido, because you are young.

"But there is more challenge in the way of life our System has set itself. Our challenge is existential. It cannot be cured temporarily by a full belly or a wench. We suppress our self, we surrender our identity for the greater benefit of society and the state. We are aware of the cost of doing so, we are also aware that the condition of life is tragic. But that is the way we have

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chosen and we must pursue it throughout life without pity for our own weaknesses, or for the weaknesses of others."

"Such as mine," said Takeido.

"Such as yours," agreed Kordan. "If we do return to the System, we shall meet again when you are on trial. I shall be in the witness box."

Sneering, Takeido raised a finger at him.

Again silence fell, and they watched idly as more figures entered the cavern. The patch of clouded sky overhead was growing dark. Cave-dwellers were entering the foreparts of the temple, parading solemnly around with candles, saluting the priests.

"The monotony of life!" exclaimed Sygiek. "We seem to have been imprisoned here for years. The region outside must be surveyed by satellites if the strike is over, and by flycraft from Peace City. If only one of us could get out..."

"Let's see what happens during this evening's ceremonies," said Dulcifer. "I have a feeling that they are going to make use of us. We may be able to snatch a chance then. Never despair, Millia, never despair."

As on the previous evening, family groups were entering; there were women among them with babies at the breast, and small children who kept silent. The complicated charades followed, meaningless to the observers. Then the people joined together into a unified group, ascended the steps, and entered the temple.

They bowed low and began to rub the palms of their hands on the two solid masses of machinery which stood below the central wooden scaffolding.

"Could those metal things be the engines of the colonist ship?" asked Constanza.

"After all this while, the original engines would have rusted away," said Burek. "These could be replicas. I had the thought that this is a kind of dumbshow about repairing the machines. Do you think so, Dulcifer? You're an engineer as well as a part-time philosopher."

"I'm an engineer but I don't know what goes on in those savages' scruffy heads. I can see what goes on in their bodies. They are a poor undernourished lot."

They had plenty of time to observe thin shanks, protruding bones, and boil-infected legs before the ceremony played itself out and the company retired. Now the family groups assembled around the central fires. Again the white-haired woman in flowing robes came forth and proceeded to relate a long story. "Can it be the same story?" asked Sygiek. "Surely they can't bear it every night. It must be different."

"Indoctrination," said Takeido, succinctly. It was the first word he had spoken for some while.

Eventually the food came on. It was served as before by the women in aprons. The man with the bag across his stomach came and collected tokens from everyone.

"Yes, you see — capitalism!" exclaimed Constanza. "They have to — to make a money payment for everything. That is their god!"

Food was brought to the prisoners. They were exempt from payment. This evening, there was a bowl for each.

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They ate without comment, avoiding each other's gaze. Even Constanza ate.

The evening wore on. After the food came another circus act, featuring two creatures with long necks, who cried as they ran about before being killed. When it was time for the next part of the ceremony, the leader appeared with his retinue. Everyone stood. A gong sounded. The leader raised an imperious hand in greeting.

He walked grandly through the temple and halted before the stalls housing the six prisoners. Striking a posture, he addressed them loudly, so that everyone present could hear. Then he motioned to his men to release them, and their shackles were struck from them.

Takeido immediately flung his arms about Rubyna Constanza.

"Dearest Rubyna, how I have longed to hold you! Tell me you understand what I was saying when I made those mad speeches."

"I am not a fool. I understand, Ian Takeido. You hate everything we believe best."

"You do not condemn me?" He drew back from her.

"When we express our own opinions, we must inevitably suffer for them. That is not *my* law — it is *the* law." That was all she said. She stood away from him and smoothed her crumpled red uniform.

"Don't use that awful word 'inevitably.' That's Kordan's word." That was all he said. He moved toward her.

The guards separated them.

Sygiek said to Kordan, quietly, "We must trust each other, Jerezy Kordan. I approve your straight speaking to Takeido. If you plan some positive action, of course I shall support it."

"That is a change of attitude for you, Millia Sygiek." He looked at her sternly and pursed his lips. "You have given me little support — in the matter of handing over your gun, for instance."

"Then pride yourself on having taken care of that item." She touched his arm. "You and I are proud people, and not entirely incompatible, as the computer properly decided. Our incompatibilities can be a matter for later discussion."

He looked her hard in the eyes. "We shall see whether what you say turns out to be a promise or a threat. Meanwhile, you must consider it your duty to support my leadership."

She sighed. "As you correctly state, we suppress our identities for the common good. We must do so now."

The guards separated them as well.

Dulcifer said to Burek, "If I have the chance to make a sudden move, I rely on you to back me up, Che Burek."

"Everyone finds me very reliable," said Burek. "That is how I have survived for so long. You saw how I swallowed my anger beneath Takeido's insults. An elephant takes no notice of a gnat."

"I'm asking you to be a *man*, not a confounded elephant."

The guards also separated them.

They were all led forward in a body.

XI

The priests had been preparing a platform. It stood in clear view of everyone, under the tall wooden scaffolding. With courteous gestures, some of the

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priests encouraged the captives to mount it. They did so. A low murmur of anticipation rose from the assembled cave-dwellers.

Constanza stood next to Kordan and clutched his arm. Her face was pale. "We are either to be honored or executed," she said.

"Don't be alarmed, Rubyna Constanza. These savages have recognized our qualities and hope for something from us. Stand by me."

Looking up, the six saw that the opening in the cavern roof was directly above them. The adjustable chair-couch stood nearby. The scaffolding was perhaps a crude imitation of some by-gone device which the capitalists had used to launch their rockets; so decided Sygiek. No stars could be seen through the roof opening tonight, but there were strange flashes of light which she could not understand. Probably a storm was brewing.

The leader of the cave-dwellers began another oration, lifting his arms. His voice roared out, echoing through the space. The mass of people, urging their children before them, surged forward, until they stood on the steps of the temple. Their faces were eager.

The platform began to move unsteadily. It lifted a centimeter or two from the ground. Firecrackers began to burst underneath.

"They understand that we are from another world," said Kordan. "They are using us as a teaching example. Stand steady. We shall come to no harm. Stand firm!"

"I'm not planning to be an example to any bunch of savages!" said Dulcifer.

The platform lifted slowly, crackers still exploding underneath. It was hauled up by ropes attached to each corner. To one side, concealed from the audience, eight priests tugged lustily at a winch.

When the platform was a meter or more in the air, it came to a halt. The people cried out. Dulcifer leapt upward and outward. He seized hold of the wooden scaffolding, swinging himself up. The leader of the cave-dwellers, who had been conducting the ascent as if it were music, gave a shout of anger. He jumped forward, pulling out a sword, brandishing it.

He ran to the scaffolding, eyes and voice raised toward Dulcifer. The priests in consternation let go of the winch handles. The platform crashed back to the ground, sending its five passengers sprawling. Dulcifer drew a gun from his pocket and fired downward.

Kordan pulled himself to his feet, face livid. "Come back, Dulcifer! You stole the gun from me when I was asleep last night, you deviant! I thought Sygiek had retrieved it. Don't shoot!"

"You're useless without the system, Kordan, get back!"

Dulcifer fired another shot and then began rapidly to climb.

"Keep going, comrade!" Takeido shouted.

The tribal leader staggered and fell back into Kordan's arms. Sygiek ran forward to help Kordan. Between them they held the leader up. He staggered and thrashed his arms about. His face was distorted with pain. Blood gushed from between his lips and, with a great cry, he died.

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The whole company rose up and began to advance up the temple steps toward the Utopians.

Dulcifer took one last look at the milling scene below. He had reached the top of the scaffolding. It swayed dangerously back and forth. As he balanced on the upper spars, legs wide, his head rose within a shallow chimney of rock leading to the world above. The chimney was little more than one and a half meters wide and two in depth. Beyond it, dark clouds scudded in a dark sky.

He tensed himself. He sprang. All the ferocious energy of his sturdy body was thrown into clinging to the rock. Stones and rubble fell away beneath his hands, but he managed to jamb himself with outstretched arms into the chimney. One foot found a hold in the side. Breath burst from his lungs, sweat seamed his face, he heaved himself up the chimney.

After a timeless interval, his head appeared in open air. His shoulders came through. With a gasp of relief, he got his arms through and hauled himself out on sloping ground. He lay where he was for a minute, clutching his bleeding palms under his arms. Then he rose, staggering slightly, and looked around.

He was free.

The hole from which he had emerged was protected by boulders. In the darkness, he could distinguish little of his surroundings. But the breeze that visited his cheek, the fresh flavor of the air, a distant sound of running water, the cool impression on his temples, even the feel of gravelly ground under his feet — all these things brought him an immediate rejoicing sense of the planet, as a man may, on an instant, recall a lost love. He raised his arms and clenched his fists to the skies and could scarcely check himself from sending up a great cheer. Grunting, he sucked the night air into his lungs.

He brought his fists down and started to pick his way downhill.

Once he was free of the protective boulders, lights met his eye. He halted, confused. Two searchlights were weaving and interlocking ahead.

"Hey, who's there?" he called. "Friend or foe?"

Seconds later, a cratobatic matboat was speeding through the air toward him. It stopped, hovered a foot above the ground, and two WUA officers with the World Unity symbol on their caps jumped down and slapped him on the back. Quickly they exchanged names and explanations. They helped Dulcifer climb aboard and settle into the exposed bucket seats. Two WUA soldiers and a man in the grim black uniform of the USRP were already aboard.

"We thought you'd never get to us," Dulcifer said. "Is the strike still on?"

The USRP official spoke. "There was no strike, Utopianist Dulcifer — get that clear. Merely a little technical problem, now disposed of. For the rest, we have come fast and efficiently. You should not question that."

Dulcifer laughed. "*You* should try being captured by cannibals some time!"

"We had a large area to search," one of the WUA officers said. "Since you were taken underground, our instruments could get no fix on you." He

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passed a flask to Dulcifer, and clapped his shoulder. "We are glad to be in time, Vul Dulcifer."

"You may not be in time, as far as the rest are concerned. Move down to the river and I'll try to show you the way in through the cliffs. Can we blow right in on this matboat?"

"You bet. No trouble."

"Good. Let's go. Every second counts." He took a deep and satisfying swig of the fiery liquid in the flask.

One of the soldiers was already transmitting information to two other scouting matboats nearby. They all converged on lower ground. On the far side of the river, a tracked land vehicle waited. Following the course of the river, the matboat sped through the air, playing its searchlight on the cliff-face. The other matboats followed.

The cliff-face was peppered with holes, each looking alike. There was no sign of life. The area appeared uninhabited.

"They pull up the ladders at night," said Dulcifer, and began to sweat. In anxiety, he pounded on his knees.

He caught sight of a bridge, present as a slab across the dull glitter of water below.

"That could be our bridge. Turn in here. Try a tunnel about ten meters up the cliff-face."

The flat craft made a smart left turn and headed straight toward the cliff. The pilot pounched buttons. The ground swallowed them. Hardly slowing, the matboat forged straight into a tunnel and then paused. Dulcifer sank back in alarm and covered his head.

A wash of light, roughly circular, preceded them as they moved forward again. The way looked promising. There were tribal sentinels here, who ran in panic before them or pressed themselves to the walls, crying in terror, hiding their eyes.

"More animals!" laughed one of the officers. "We are on the right track." He brought up a weapon and began to fire. A sentinel fell writhing and was lost behind in the darkness. The soldiers cheered.

Dulcifer grabbed the officer's arm. "Don't shoot them down. They aren't animals."

The tunnel curved, branched, twisted left. A barricade rushed toward them. A blaze of orange light from the front of their craft and the timbers disappeared in smoke. They swept through a cloud of angry ash and burst into the main cavern, lights blazing.

Crowds of cave-dwellers, snatching up their children, ran in all directions. Screams rang out. The officers raised their guns again.

"Don't shoot!" cried Dulcifer.

The matboat stopped a few centimeters above the ground. Officers, soldiers, Dulcifer, jumped out.

In the temple stood Sygiek, Kordan, Constanza, Burek and Takeido, momentarily paralyzed in a tableau. The dead tribal leader lay at their feet. The leader's retinue and various priests crouched nearby in attitudes of worship. The rest of the congregation, now breaking away to run for their lives, had also been in kneeling positions.

"You are all right? We are in time?" called Dulcifer, concernedly, hurrying forward to his friends. "My dear Millia Sygiek — you are safe!"

Sygiek had drawn herself up against

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Kordan, who clasped her arm. She stood tensely, regarding Dulcifer with her grey eyes as he approached. Her face was expressionless. Dignitaries and priests gave way before him, but she did not stir.

"You're a mad dog, Utopianist Dulcifer," said Kordan, putting out a hand. "You have broken the law with your use of firearms — that and all your other offenses will not go disregarded, be sure of that."

Dulcifer ignored him and looked intensely at Sygiek.

"Millia, speak to me! Our ordeal is over."

"They fell down before us. They worshipped us. They accepted us as gods," she said, in an amazed way. "How little they comprehend. And how little we comprehend about ourselves."

"Leave her alone, Dulcifer," said Kordan. "When you shot their leader, what was to stop them tearing us apart in revenge? Little you cared! By good fortune, we were so firmly embedded in a godlike role in their ritual that they accepted the killing as justified, as a sacrifice, and did us no harm. We could all have been dead by now."

Dulcifer tapped him derisively on the chest. "You've done little enough to save your skin, Kordan. Think yourself lucky that there's someone in this universe fool enough to mistake you for a god." He turned to Sygiek and embraced her, holding her against his clumsy body, stroking her hair.

"They spared us," she exclaimed, in the same dazed voice as before. "They must worship power and see us as all powerful. Why else should they spare us?"

"That's a law of the universe — worshipping power," said Dulcifer. "But I did worry for you, Millia Sygiek, just in case the laws of the universe happened to fail for once. Fortunately, there is also such a thing as mercy."

"Mercy ..." Sygiek came out of her daze and clutched him fiercely. "Yes, even I have heard of mercy, Vul. I want to talk to you. Properly talk. When we get back home. Let's dare to speak to each other."

He clasped her, out of words, as her eyes shone into his.

As the dwellers of the cave stole away, two more matboats arrived in the cavern. Soldiers jumped out with guns at the ready, partly encircling the six tourists. The tourists were embracing and congratulating each other on surviving. Burek's rumbling laugh sounded. Officers and soldiers were cheering.

But Rubyna Constanza broke from Ian Takeido's grasp with an angry exclamation and walked down the temple steps toward the official of the USRP. Takeido made to follow her, then stopped. Her name burst from his lips. "Rubyna Constanza!" Pale of face, she did not look back.

The other tourists turned, caught by a sudden chill in the air. The soldiers fell silent.

The USRP official, his boots twinkling in high polish, moved forward to meet Constanza. His seamed face was creased into a smile, his hands were outstretched.

"Greetings! There will be much official relief to know that you are still alive and safe, Official Rubyna Constanza," he said. "We have searched ceaselessly for you ever since rescuing

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the others of your wrecked bus party yesterday."

Constanza touched his hands. She straightened her back and spoke in a voice the others hardly recognized.

"You took far too long. We have been much humiliated, Official Gunnar Gastovich, humiliated. Somebody must be held responsible."

"My apologies, Comrade Official. Deepest apologies. The strike obstructed our purposes — the guilty parties will be dealt with. Of that you can be sure. We will transport you back to Peace City at once."

Ignoring his remark, Constanza straightened her uniform and turned to confront the tourists.

"Official Gunnar Gastovich, I order you to arrest these five tourists, Ian Takeido, Che Burek, Vul Dulcifer, Jerezy Kordan, and the woman Millia Sygiek. Take them into custody at once. I shall make a full report when I return to Peace City. I have uncovered a conspiracy against our beloved system."

Gastovich snapped his fingers and the soldiers began to move in.

"She's insane!" called Kordan. "Nobody is more loyal to the system than I. I am an Academician, an honored and respected academician of the IPUS. You cannot arrest me. You shall be punished for this, Comrade Rubyna Constanza, when I get back to Earth. I demand to know the charges."

Takeido was weeping and calling her name.

"Be quiet, Ian Takeido," Constanza said severely. "You are showing manifestations of guilt, which are duly noted. The others will have to testify to your lengthy polemics against the state, which carry a maximum penalty. As for the rest of you —" She raised her finger and pointed it at Sygiek, Kordan and Dulcifer. "These three persons came to this planet for subversive purposes. They are members of a cell and shared possession of an illegal weapon, as will be testified."

Burek shook his fist. "Don't leave me out of your roll of honor, you witch! I stand by my comrades. I hate the USRP as much as they do, and I will be punished as they are."

"Silence!" bawled Gastovich.

"The charges against these criminals," said Constanza. Her voice faltered and she started the sentence again. "The charges against these criminals include conspiracy, sedition, hostile logic, deformed thought-processes, misapplication of history, free discussion of classified matters, treachery against the party, pessimism, collusion with traitors, and intent to conspire with degenerate capitalists who scheme to take over control of this planet. All five are enemies of the system — guard them closely!"

She swayed as she spoke. Gastovich steadied her. He gestured angrily at the WUA officers, who were hesitating. Even the soldiers had paused, confronting the five accused where they stood in a tight group on the lowest step of the temple.

"What are you waiting for? Arrest those scum!"

The gun was in Dulcifer's hand. He pushed Sygiek behind him. He held the gun at arm's length, aiming it at the black-clad Reason Police official.

"Stay where you are, everyone, or that piece of shit dies. Officers of the

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WUA, you are honorable men, I ask you —"

One shot rang out. An officer from the third matboat had fired from the hip. Dulcifer fell back into the arms of Millia Sygiek, dropping his gun, clasping his shoulder. The soldiers rushed forward.

Ignoring the shouts and cries, Gastovich bowed to Constanza. He gestured toward his craft. "The prisoners shall travel in one of the other boats. You will please accompany me. You have done good work and honors will be bestowed upon you. Now — the sooner we get back to civilization the better."

The five prisoners were goaded or carried into the other machines. Engines started. The three craft turned in perfect formation. They sped from the cavern, through the tunnels, and into the night of Lysenka II.

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ALEXEI AND CORY PANSHIN

Books

A few years ago, in the course of reviewing Brian W. Aldiss's *Billion Year Spree,* his account of the history of science fiction, we ran into basic internal contradictions of outlook that we could resolve only by the suggestion that there were two Brian Aldisses. One was the young rebel who had discovered SF pulp magazines sent to England as ship ballast and sold cheap in Woolworths' (3p at the counter marked "Yank Mags"), and loved them for their breadth and vitality. The other was a mandarin, an elitist who proposed to divide science fiction into two parts, juvenile junk and high literature, and to cast his lot with the second of these, and never mind the fact that doing so might mean throwing out all the qualities of SF that first brought Aldiss to the genre so many years ago.

If contemporary psychological research is to be credited, the split between head and heart, between rationality and intuition, is not Brian Aldiss's problem alone. Mending the split — which is the result of varying specialization in the two hemispheres of the brain — is the psychic challenge of the era, made more difficult by the fact that the rationalistic processes are "louder," more verbal, easier to attend to than the holistic flashes of

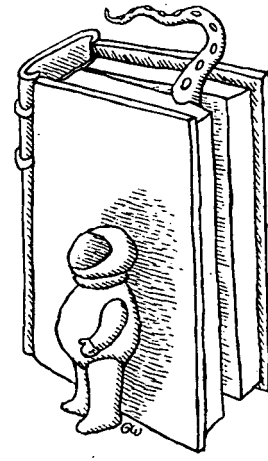
Galactic Empires, Vol. One and Vol. Two, ed. by Brian Aldiss, St. Martin's Press, 1977, $8.95 & $8.95.

Weird Heroes, Vol. Six, ed. by Bryon Preiss, Pyramid, 1977, $1.75.

Catchworld, by Chris Boyce, Doubleday, 1977, $6.95.

A Place Beyond Man, by Cary Neeper, Dell, 1977, $1.50.

Hunter of Worlds, by C.J. Cherryh, DAW Books, 1977, $1.75.



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intuition. Writing here four years ago, we criticized *Billion Year Spree* for its fragmentary nature, its divisiveness, its insistence on the application of standards derived from conventional mimetic literature which seemed inappropriate to the actualities of SF. But if the new psychology is correct,* we cannot dwell too long and too hard on anyone's verbalisms and formal ideas, including Aldiss's, but instead should look at the whole of what they have to offer. We might notice, for instance, that while it was the rationalistic mandarin Aldiss who wrote the introduction to his compilation *Science Fiction Art,* it was the non-rational, open-hearted lover who edited what is clearly the broadest and warmest of the SF art books of the last several years.

In the new two-volume anthology, *Galactic Empires,* it is again the lover and holist Brian Aldiss who is dominant. It is this Aldiss who says: "You have to love the throw-away explanation... You have to love the way villains or heroes flee across the remote star galaxies in pursuit of each other. You have to love the way Elder Races, Hideous Secrets, Ancient Forces or plain sneaky old teleporters crop up at every turn. And you have to love the imperial women." And it is this Aldiss who identifies the non-rational values of these pulp space operas (which a pure rationalist could only consider worthless juvenile junk of the most patent sort): "What the authors do in the main is to tell a story adorned with alien creatures, swordplay, fascinating gadgets, and — for preference — beautiful princesses. The story itself is fairly traditional, the crux being resolved by quick wits, courage, and brute strength. If this sounds like the recipe for a fairy-tale, the point about fairy tales is that they enchant us and enlarge our perceptions... Science is thin stuff beside this legendary material."

True, true, all true.

There are twenty-six stories contained in the two volumes of *Galactic Empires,* detailing the rise, maturity and decay of interstellar civilization. The book is not a mere theme anthology; it is an historical record, a summing of a specific phase in an earlier period of science fiction. The bulk of the stories are from the five years 1950-54, the heyday of the galactic empire theme. There are three earlier stories, clearly precursors, and a handful of later stories, clearly vestiges.

Aldiss has done his homework, digging through the pages of *Planet*

**Readers interested in the subject might have a look at Robert E. Ornstein's* The Psychology of Consciousness.

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Stories, Super Science, and *Startling,* as well as *Astounding* and *Galaxy.* Most of what he found will be unfamiliar to contemporary readers, and the book is so well-integrated that stories which might appear weak or frivolous or questionable when taken on their own assume power and even dignity within the larger context. Through philosophical introductions and quotations from Olaf Stapledon, Aldiss establishes a perspective encompassing many races, many eras, giving *Galactic Empires* a scope and weight as a whole that is simply not present in the stories taken individually.

Galactic Empires is a most readable anthology, lively, vigorous and entertaining. If it has one single obvious limitation, this defect is not in the conception or in the execution of the editing, but is inherent, the reciprocal of the great virtue of the book. That is, the material of the anthology forms a whole, indeed, can be *perceived* as forming a whole, can be arranged as a whole, only because it is stuff of the past, the mirror of yesterday's problems, and yesterday's solutions, too. The stories derive in the main from one concentrated early Fifties period because they are the direct reflection of the head state of the time.

Aldiss says: "Some commentators have claimed to find something sinister in the idea of a galactic civilization, linking it to American Imperialist designs. This seems to me absurd; the stories do not bear that sort of weight of interpretation."

We feel compelled to disagree with Aldiss here, at least in part. The stories do not seem to us sinister, and neither would we speak of "American Imperialist designs." But it seems to us undeniable that they reflect (in the main) the macho, materialistic, might-makes-right attitudes that dominated American thinking in the early Fifties. In fact, what is to be found in these stories is not so much sinister imperialist designs as the theme of the lusty space barbarian injecting vitality into a universe grown effete. How far is it to leap from Poul Anderson's "Star Plunderer" to Graham Greene's American naif in Indo-China in *The Quiet American?* And from there to the American conduct of the war in Vietnam? To an American observer in 1977, blessed with the gift of hindsight, not far at all.

The case against American thinking of twenty years ago is so potentially "provable" that we can only be grateful that some bright Italian Communist, say, did not beat Aldiss to his theme. A careful choice of stories could be damning. But Aldiss has not been doctrinaire in his selections. He has represent-

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ed a wider reality than the merely materialistic, merely political. The stories that he includes by Clifford Simak, Algis Budrys and Harry Harrison question the assumptions of galactic empire and human dominance (read "American dominance"). They reflect that innocence and idealism that were also present in American thinking in the early Fifties — those qualities that have enabled us to survive the period just concluded, the period of Vietnam and Watergate. Most interestingly, all three of these stories express a longing for communion with aliens — a theme far more characteristic of present day SF than of the science fiction of the time in which these stories first appeared.

Thank you, Brian. A model anthology.

The *Weird Heroes* series, edited by Byron Preiss, is an attempt to capture the virtues of the pulp magazines of yesteryear and present them in contemporary paperback format. Preiss writes: "These pulp artists, heroes and authors are to a large extent the literary heritage of *Weird Heroes.* The adventure pulps provided readers with characters that were *fun* to read, whose exploits invited the purchaser to immerse him- or herself in the story on hand. The sf pulps were a visual treat, giving the readers a glimpse of worlds yet unseen, tantalizing them with panoramas of depth and movement which often excelled the stories themselves. If the pulps were to be criticized for anything, it was that in their zeal to entertain, they also lapsed into mindless use of racist, sexist and violent situations which, frankly, showed up in most media of the time. So, our purpose: to develop a *new* showcase for heroic fiction in the seventies; to establish a place where characters reflecting current times could have their adventures; to lay the groundwork for a continuing publication which gives ample room for the presentation of new fantasy graphics."

Is it possible or even desirable to revive the pulp magazines in this new format? Can it be done, and is it worth doing?

For the graphic side of *Weird Heroes, Volume Six,* Preiss has drawn upon comic artists like Alex Nino and Ralph Reese and given them full pages in which to display their talents. In art and design, *Weird Heroes* is something new and dynamic. We are not sure that the pulp magazines at their best have been surpassed, but it does seem quite likely that Preiss has hold of a live wire here, an area for exploration and development.

The fiction printed in *Weird Heroes* is by established SF writers Ron Goulart, Ben Bova and Philip José Farmer, and recent SF writer Arthur Byron Cover. It seems much

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less successful than the artwork. It often lapses into mindless sexism and violence. Even more often, it is not genuinely heroic. Instead, what we are given is an emotionally affectless merging together of worn-out popular story conventions from an earlier day, locked-room mystery dissolved into galactic SF, *Unknown* fantasy explained in unmagical terms, Raymond Chandler mated with Beowulf. This last is Arthur Byron Cover's "Galactic Gumshoe." About it, Cover says, "What I do like about 'Galactic Gumshoe' is the smart-ass quality of the narrative, the smooth prose (save for a few passages), and the way it glorifies [*sic*] in its punk existentialism." In short, what we have here is the debased and degenerated attitudes of an earlier time presented to cynical young comic-book grads. The fictional side of *Weird Heroes* does not seem ultimately viable, but an atavism, a living fossil, the last expression of those attitudes and materials that Aldiss has collected in *Galactic Empires* in fresher and more sincere form.

The fact is that the Seventies are not the Thirties. It is not possible today to write or think like Raymond Chandler, or like E.E. Smith. And travesty of the pulps is not a true route to recapturing the virtues of the pulps.

The most worthy piece in *Weird Heroes, Volume Six* is a final memoir by Edmond Hamilton, author of seminal Interstellar Patrol stories in the late Twenties, of Captain Future novels, and of Superman comic book scenarios. Hamilton died last February, and is sincerely mourned by us. The era he represents is also dead. There is no going back.

The three remaining books we have for review this month are not recapitulations like *Galactic Empires* or degenerations like *Weird Heroes*, but honest (if not wholly successful) attempts to express the problems and attitudes of the present time in SF form. These novels are truly of this present unique moment, the mental configuration of the latter Seventies. Their authors are all writers to read, writers to watch.

Catchworld is a first novel by a young Scotsman, Chris Boyce. It was a joint winner of a Gollancz/London *Times* SF prize. In an effort to bring the book to the attention of the American SF audience, Ian Watson — perhaps the most purely brilliant of the new SF writers of the Seventies — has nominated *Catchworld* for an SFWA Nebula Award. With these recommendations behind us, it should also be said that if *Catchworld* were not a first novel by a young author published in a time of uncertainty

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and confusion, it would seem less endorsable and far more questionable than it does.

The initial situation of *Catchworld* is very old head in appearance: a fleet of starships newly set out from Earth on a mission of retaliation against crystalloid beings from Altair who have launched an unprovoked attack against our planet. At the outset, the story appears very technically oriented, not unlike, say, the middle sections of *2001*. As we get deeper into the book, however, the novel reveals itself as something quite different from its initial appearance. It becomes a reality trip exported to interstellar space. The real issue of the book is revealed to be the question of whose "reality" will dominate: the commander of the ship, one or another of the crew, the Machine Intelligence that operates the ship, the programmers of the mission, the aliens that are encountered, or the mysterious force known as the Crow.

The virtues of *Catchworld* are its vigor, its pace, its ceaseless inventiveness, its willingness to plunge headlong into the unknown, and its sometimes brilliant suggestions — as, for instance, the idea that communication with aliens may be achieved on emotional rather than intellectual grounds. The sheer energy generated by *Catchworld* is a rare and valuable quality in a decade when the horizons of SF have been drawn tight around unresolvable knots of defeat, madness and eco-catastrophe.

As to the limitations of *Catchworld*... The events of the story are often so murky as to be nearly unintelligible. Characters, events and plot lines are introduced and then never developed, never resolved, never used for anything beyond the immediate zap of a cheap thrill. Ultimately, the book comes perilously close to fitting that situation described by H.G. Wells where anything can happen and nothing is interesting.

Catchworld is a work where much is risked. It is a dance on the razor's edge. Is what is attempted successfully achieved in the end? Probably not. But we would be the last to say that the risks were not worth taking. This book's failures are worth more than many another book's easy success. Look for *Catchworld,* and look, too, for Boyce's next book. If he gets his act together, he could be SF's next resident wildman.

A Place Beyond Man by Cary Neeper is a far more straightforward and intelligible first novel. It is very much a book of this moment, imbued with an overwhelming sense of the negative consequences of those commonplace ideas and attitudes of yesterday

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that are expressed so offhandedly in the stories included in *Galactic Empire.* Neeper is freaked and nauseated by the ruthless, power-oriented, masculine, "rational" left-brain thinking that threatens to ruin the delicate balances of the biosphere and redound on mankind. As late as the Fifties, power could still be held to be an all-in-all. Neeper knows that power without an equivalent sense of responsibility is corrupt and perverse.

In the near-future we are shown in *A Place Beyond Man* there is "little remaining on Earth that one could call beautiful, few moments that one might call peaceful — but no one there seemed to care. Most human beings let economic pressures downgrade all other considerations to secondary importance." Great suffering and massive die-offs are in prospect. "Meanwhile, those human beings who could obtain enough food and fuel to maintain their mental acuity lived an existence in a dulled awareness, the increasingly lowered minimal standards for air and water purity slowly squeezing thin their hope that they might escape the worsening health statistics for one more year."

You get the picture. And if this were a book published five years ago, you would have the whole picture. Final scene: the last man on Earth going glug-glug-glug as he drowns in a puddle of purple glurp. But this is a later moment, and the book offers more than this.

In *A Place Beyond Man,* there is an observation base on the Moon occupied by (shrewd stroke, token of the new moment) *two* different species of good-guy humanoid aliens, the varoks and the ellls, living in harmony, more-or-less, and watching us as we go glug-glug-glug. In an opening sequence that has altogether too much Gothic Romance about it, sensitive, idealistic young microbiologist Tandra Grey is approached at a party by a tall, dark elllonian stranger who gives her the option of accompanying him to the Moon — and off she goes.

Once this initial lump is swallowed — and it's a small lump — *A Place Beyond Man* has much to offer: the aliens and their base, as we get to know them in intimate detail, are fascinating. The story (unlike *Catchworld*) is centered on character interactions. The story is sincere (oh rare virtue in the cynical Seventies) and dedicated to the highest values that the author can imagine. Perhaps the best thing in the novel is Tandra's growing awareness that the froggy elllonians are not human, not to be forced into her conventional mental categories, but are truly different in ways that must be respected. A far cry from the "might makes right and human beings are the rightest

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of all" attitudes of Campbellian SF.

The ending of the book is a bit of a disappointment. Cary Neeper cannot solve the fundamental problems she has set for herself. Tandra Grey, after her alien education, returns to Earth, but cannot make a dent in the attitudes that are ruining the planet. This is token of our times, when sensitive human beings like Neeper can *see* the changes that must be made, but cannot yet really believe that they will be made. At the end, all Tandra can do is call on her new found friends and go away with them to a better world elsewhere, murmuring, "So much for Earth."

Not enough. Not enough. Not for all of us readers (and Cary Neeper) who are still faced with the prospect of that purple puddle.

Not enough — but still a far better than ordinary first novel.

C.J. Cherryh, like Cary Neeper, is one of the large number of female writers who have begun to write SF in the Seventies, visible token of those changes in attitude and priority that have made star plundering and galactic barbarianhood the stuff of another now than the present one. Once upon a time, thirty years ago, there were only C.L. Moore and Leigh Brackett at work in the SF domain, disguised behind names that could be taken for male, writing stories that could be taken for the work of men. That simply isn't the case now. After the handful of women writers who became prominent in the Sixties — Kate Wilhelm, Anne McCaffrey, Joanna Russ and Ursula K. Le Guin — a deluge has ensued. It is possible to name half-a-dozen promising new male writers of the Seventies, but it is just as possible to name fifteen or twenty women. A sign of basic change, and one that should be welcomed. If we are to solve the overwhelming problems of this moment, we need the thoughts and ideas that women have held private, we need new and broader mythic expressions.

Of the three new novels that are reviewed here, it is *Hunter of Worlds* by C.J. Cherryh that is most deeply rooted and most original. Cherryh is a woman in her thirties who has been writing novel after novel in private since she was a young teen-ager. The practice has served her well. *Hunter of Worlds* is the third novel by Cherryh to be published in the space of little more than a year. The first of these, *Gate of Ivrel,* was introduced enthusiastically by Andre Norton, who wished aloud that she could write like Cherryh, and was reviewed with equal enthusiasm in these pages by Algis Budrys, who called Cherryh "a born storyteller." A born storyteller? We can't be too sure of that, not with all those years

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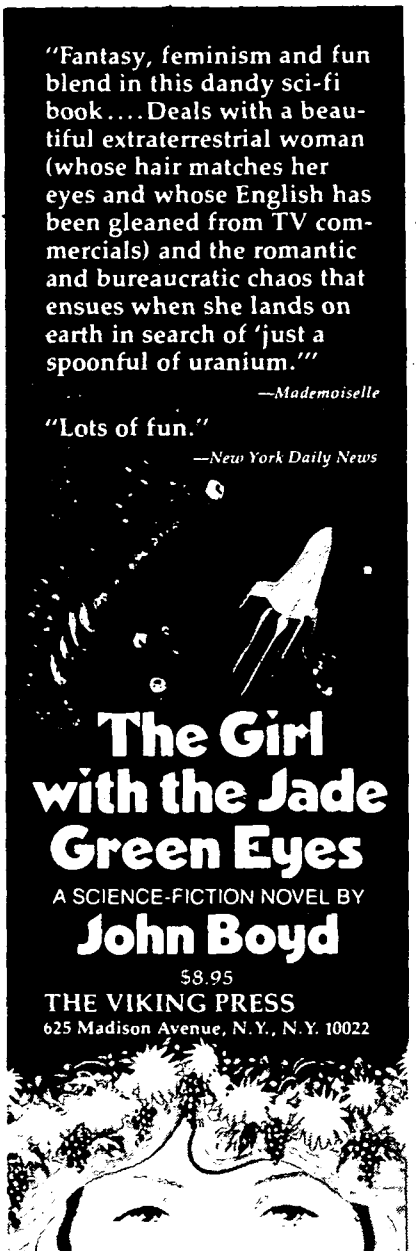
and years of hard work behind her. That may be selling Cherryh short. But there can be no doubt that she is a pure storyteller in a sense that Boyce and Neeper are not — or are not yet. Storytelling, in this sense, encompasses not just event, as in Boyce's novel, or character, as in Neeper's, but the two woven together in dynamic interaction.

Like other young writers who came of age in the Sixties, and like so many of the new female writers in particular, Cherryh's impulse is to combine the virtues of traditional science fiction and heroic fantasy. Her roots can be seen to lie in works like *The Lord of the Rings*, *Dune*, and the early romantic novels of Ursula Le Guin. But *Hunter of Worlds* is cast not as sword-and-sorcery or as after-the-bomb melodrama, but as a new sort of galactic adventure, clearly related to the work that Aldiss reprints in *Galactic Empires*, but just as clearly work of a new order.

What is the difference? Perhaps it lies in the fact that humanity is relatively peripheral in this novel, not the central locus of interest, not the lusty muscular rulers of the universe. There are, in fact, no less than three other races of alien beings, each with its own distinct psychology, that stand closer to the center of this story. A situation of this sort would simply not have existed in that earlier era. That it can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exist now is token, perhaps, of the passing of American insularity and parochialism. It is an admission that other modes of thought than our own exist, and that some of them may be older and more central than ours. This is underscored by a device that *Hunter of Worlds* shares with Neeper's *A Place Beyond Man* — the frequent use of alien terms. Language is the wellspring of autonomous realities, as Tolkien, in effect, has taught us. But where Neeper gives us one glossary, Cherryh presents us with no less than three.

The result is *real,* but it also makes for slow, hard reading. At any moment you may be faced with a sentence like this: "He is a peculiar being, this *m'metane,* a little rash with us, and without any sense of *takkhenes* to feel his way over the most deadly ground; but his *chanokhia* appeals to me." It is another case, perhaps, of a virtue carrying with it its own defect. The alien vocabularies of *Hunter of Worlds* are both an evidence of other states of mind and an impediment to full identification, full rapport, with the ongoing story.

The other chief limitation of *Hunter of Worlds* is the smallness of the problem posed and resolved, particularly small when compared with the scope of the setting. Cherryh's characters are forced into slavery by the dominant race of the book, the Iduve, forcibly jammed into a mental menage by the Iduve, in order to attack a problem of social dominance and honor raised by an Iduvian renegade. The Iduvian problem is settled, but at the end of the story the focal characters are still slaves and the fundamental imbalance between species still remains. Again, not enough. But again, this insufficiency, this inability to resolve problems on the widest scale that is shared by all three of the novels we are reviewing may be a factor of the cloudiness and uncertainty of the decade in which they were written.

In any case, stick with Cherryh. She's really going to be good.

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Jane Yolen, who writes traditional fantasy tales with unmatched grace and simplicity, returns with the strange story of a woman who weds a tree and bears its child. Ms. Yolen's latest book is Shape Shifters, *just published by The Seabury Press.*

The Tree's Wife

by JANE YOLEN

There was once a young woman named Drusilla who had been widowed longer than she was wed. She had been married at fifteen to a rich old man who beat her. She had flowered despite his ill treatment, and it was he who died, within the year, leaving her all alone in the great house.

Once the old man was dead, his young widow was courted by many, for she was now quite wealthy. The young men came together and all claimed that she needed a husband to help her.

But Drusilla would not have them. "When I was poor," she said, "none of you courted me. When I was ill-treated, none of you stood by me. I never asked more than a gentle word, yet I never received one. So now that you ask, I will have none of you."

She turned her back on them, then stopped. She looked around at the grove of birch trees by her house. "Why, I would sooner wed this tree," she said, touching a sturdy birch that stood to one side. "A tree would know when to bend and when to stand. I would sooner wed this tree than marry another man."

At that very moment, a passing wind caused the top branches of the birch to sway.

The rejected suitors laughed at Drusilla. "See," they jeered, "the tree has accepted your offer."

And so she was known from that day as the Tree's Wife.

To keep the jest from hurting, Drusilla entered into it with a will. If someone came to the house, she would put her arms around the birch, caressing its bark and stroking its limbs.

"I have all I need or want with my tree," she would say. And her laugh was a silent one back at the stares. She knew that nothing confounds jokers as madness. So she

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was very mad for them.

But madness makes men uneasy; they fear contagion. And soon Drusilla found herself quite alone. Since it was not of her choosing, the aloneness began to gnaw at her. It was true she wanted a kind word, but soon any word would have done.

So it happened one night, when the moon hung in the sky like a ripe yellow apple, that a wind blew fiercely from the north. It caused the trees to bow and bend and knock their branches against Drusilla's house. Hearing them knock, she looked out of the windows and saw the trees dancing wildly in the wind.

They seemed to beckon and call, and she was suddenly caught up in their rhythm. She swayed with them and moved to a wind within her. But it was not enough. She longed for the touch of wind on her skin. So she ran outside, leaving the door ajar. She raised her hands above her head and danced with the trees.

In the darkness, surrounded by the shadow of its brothers, one tree seemed to shine. It was her tree, the one she had chosen. It was touched with a phosphorescent glow, and the vein of each leaf was a streak of pale fire.

Drusilla danced over to the tree and held her hands towards it. "Oh, if only you *were* a man, or I a tree," she said out loud. "If you were a man tall and straight and gentle and strong, then — yes — then I would be happy."

The wind died as suddenly as it had begun, and the trees stood still. Drusilla dropped her hands, feeling foolish and shamed, but a movement in the white birch stayed her. As she watched, it seemed to her that first two legs, then a body, then a head and arms emerged from the bark, a shadowy image pulling itself painfully free of the trunk. The image shimmered for a moment, trembled, and then became clear. Before her stood a man.

He was tall and slim, with skin as white as the bark of birch and hair as black as the birch patches. His legs were strong yet supple, and his feet were knotty and tapered like roots. His hands were thin and veined with green, and the second and third fingers grew together, slotted like a leaf. He smiled at her and held out his arms, an echo of her earlier plea, and his arms swayed up and down as if touched by a passing breeze.

Drusilla stood without movement, without breath. Then he nodded his head and she went into his arms. When his mouth came down on hers she smelled the damp woody odor of his breath.

They lay together all night below his tree, cradled in its roots. But when the sun began its climb

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against the farthest hills, the man pulled himself reluctantly from Drusilla's arms and disappeared back into the tree.

Call as she might, Drusilla could not bring him out again, but one of the tree branches reached down and sroked her arm in a lover's farewell.

She spent the next days under the tree, reading and weaving and playing her lute. And the tree itself seemed to listen and respond. The branches touched and turned the pages of her book. The whole tree swayed to the beauty of her songs.

Yet it was not until the next full moon that the man could pull himself from the tree and sleep away the dark in her arms.

Still, Drusilla was content. For as she grew in her love for the man of the tree, her love for all nature grew, a quiet pullulation. She felt kin to every flower and leaf. She heard silent speech of the green world; and under the bark, the beating of each heart.

One day, when she ventured into the village, Drusilla's neighbors thought her growing beautiful in her madness. The boldest of them, an old woman, asked, "If you have no man, how is it you bloom?"

Drusilla turned to look at the old woman and smiled. It was a slow smile. "I am the tree's wife," she said, "in truth. And he is man enough for me." It was all the answer she would return.

But in the seventh month since the night of the apple moon, Drusilla knew she carried a child, the tree's child, below her heart. And when she told the tree of it, its branches bent around her and touched her hair. And when she told the man of it, he smiled and held her gently and spoke her name.

Drusilla wondered what the child would be that rooted in her. She wondered if it would burgeon into a human child or emerge some great wooden beast. Perhaps it would be both, with arms and legs as strong as the birch and leaves for hair. She feared her heart would burst with questions. But on the next full moon, the tree man held her and whispered in her ear such soft, caressing sounds, she grew calm. And at last she knew that however the child grew, she would love it. And with that knowledge she was once again content.

Soon it was evident, even to the townsfolk, that she blossomed with child. They looked for the father among themselves — for where else could they look? — but no one admitted to the deed. And Drusilla herself would name no one but the tree to midwife, priest or mayor.

And so, where at first the villagers had jested at her and joked with her and felt themselves plagued by her madness, now they turned

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wicked and cruel. They could accept madness but not a mother unwed.

The young men, the late suitors, pressed on by the town elders, came to Drusilla one night. In the darkness, they would have pulled her from her house and beaten her. But Drusilla heard them come and climbed through the window and fled to the top of the birch.

The wind raged so that night that the branches of the tree flailed like whips, and not one of the young men dared come close enough to climb the tree and take Drusilla down. All they could do was try and wound her with their words. They shouted up at her where she sat near the top of the birch, cradled in its branches. But she did not hear their shouts. She was lulled instead by the great rustling voices of the grove.

In the morning the young men were gone. They did not return.

And Drusilla did not return again to the town. As the months passed, she was fed by the forest and the field. Fruits and berries and sweet sap found their way to her doorstep. Each morning she found enough for the day. She did not ask where it all came from, but still she knew.

At last it was the month for the child to be born. The night of the full moon, Drusilla's pains began. Holding her sides with slender fingers, she went out to the base of the birch, sat down, and leaned her back against the tree, straining to let the child out. As she pushed, the birch-man pulled himself silently from the tree, knelt by her, and breathed encouragements into her face. He stroked her hair and whispered her name to the wind.

She did not smile up at him but said at last, "Go." Her breath was ragged and her voice on the edge of despair. "I beg you, go. Get the midwife. This does not go well."

The tree man held her close but he did not get up to go.

"Go," she begged. "Tell her my name. It is time."

He took her face in his hands and stared long into it with his woodsgreen eyes. He pursed his lips as if to speak, then stood up and was gone.

He went down the path towards the town, though each step from the tree drew his strength from him. Patches of skin peeled off as he moved, and the sores beneath were dark and viscous. His limbs grew more brittle with each step, and he moved haltingly, an aged and broken thing, to the midwife's house. He knocked upon the door, yet he was so weak, it was only a light tapping, a scraping, the scratching of a branch across a window.

As if she had waited for such a call, the midwife came at once. Her

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mumbling could be heard through the closed door. She opened it and stared at what stood before her. Tall and thin and naked and white, with black patches of scabrous skin and hair as dark as rotting leaves, the tree man held up his hand. The gash of his mouth was hollow and tongueless, a sap-filled wound. He made no sound, but the midwife screamed and screamed and, screaming still, slammed the door.

She did not see him fall.

In the morning the townsfolk came to Drusilla's great house. They came armed with clubs and cudgels and forks. The old midwife was in the rear, calling the way.

Beneath a dead white tree they found Drusilla, pale and barely moving, the child opened its eyes. They were the color of winter pine.

"Poor thing," said the midwife, stepping in front of the men. "I knew no good would come of this." She bent to take the child from Drusilla's arms but leaped up again with a cry. For the child had uncurled one tiny fist and its hand was veined with green and the second and third fingers grew together, slotted like a leaf.

At the midwife's cry, the birches in the grove began to move and sway, though there was not a breath of breeze. And before any weapon could be raised, the nearest birch stretched its branches far out and lifted the child and Drusilla up, up towards the top of the tree.

As the townsfolk watched, Drusilla disappeared. The child seemed to linger for a moment longer, its unclothed body gleaming in the sun. Then slowly the child faded, like melting snow on pine needles, like the last white star of morning, into the heart of the tree.

There was a soughing as of wind through branches, a tremble of leaves, and one sharp cry of an unsuckled child. Then the trees in the grove were still.

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THE WESLEYAN/SUFFIELD WRITER READER CONFERENCE

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The background of this story is Aventine, an artists' colony that figured in Lee Killough's earlier stories, "The Siren Garden," (March 1974) and "Tropic of Eden," (August 1977). This new tale concerns the visit to Aventine of Selene and Amanda, two different personalities that share the body of one beautiful young woman.

A House Divided

by LEE KILLOUGH

Amanda Gail and Selene Randall came to Aventine during the autumn hiatus, when the last of the summer residents had gone back to jobs in the city or followed the sun south and the winter influx of skiers and skaters was still some weeks away. Aventine scarcely noticed them, and if my current cohab had not gone off through the Diana Mountain Stargate on some interstellar artists' junket, they might never have been more than clients to me, either. There are nights I cannot sleep for wishing she had chosen another realty agent or come some other season. I was alone, though, in the boredom of autumn when Amanda walked into my office with her seeds of tragedy and elected me gardener.

"Matthew Gordon?" she asked in a soft, hesitant voice I remembered from political broadcasts in the last election, extolling the senatorial virtues of her father. "I'm Amanda Gail. I wired you about renting a cabin?"

I nodded. "I have your wire."

Her pictures, though, did not do her justice. Not only was I surprised to find her taller than I expected, fully as tall as I was, but no media camera had ever captured the glow that shone out through her otherwise rather plain face, giving her the look of a Renaissance Madonna and adding nostalgic charm to her loose topknot of copper hair and high-waisted Regency-style dress.

"How many will be in your party?" I asked.

Eyes with the warm brilliance of goldstone looked at me through her lashes. "I'm alone."

I nodded again, at the same time wondering how Amanda Gail could ever, really, consider herself alone. The acrimonious divorce of former Olympic runner Margot Randall and Senator Charles Christopher Gail had traumatically di-

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vided not only Amanda's childhood but her very psyche. Five years ago, when Margot Randall died in a hovercraft accident and Amanda moved to Washington full-time, it emerged that for most of her childhood, Amanda Selene Gail had been two personalities, Amanda Gail and another calling herself Selene Randall. The revelation, and their decision to remain dissociated, had made them the darlings of the gossip columns.

"Senator Moran told me I could live here in privacy. Is that true?" Amanda asked.

"Yes. Aventine has too many rich and famous residents to care about another celebrity, and as we have no hotels or public transportation and the cabletrain from Gateside is the only way in, aside from private aircraft on private landing fields, we manage to discourage most reporters and curiosity seekers."

She smiled. "Wonderful."

That smile was remarkable. It turned the light in her to dazzling incandescence.

"My runabout is outside. I'll show you what I have available."

I was carrying a long list of rentals, owned by summer people who authorized winter leasing to pay for the upkeep on their property. They were all over Aventine, from a few apartments down near the shopping square to cabins in the woods and along the shores of both the Lunamere and Heliomere. I explained the choices to Amanda as I handed her into the runabout and unplugged the car from its charger. The Lunamere's main attraction in winter was that it froze over, making sixteen kilometers of ice for skating. The Heliomere was fed by hot springs and at thirty-five degrees C was suitable for year-round swimming.

"I'm no swimmer but I prefer hot water to ice," Amanda said.

I drove her up to a little A-frame at No. 43 Apollo on the lower shore of the Heliomere. It was a good size for a single person, with a deck all around and steps down to the beach in back. Amanda admired the white expanse of the beach, which would have gratified the city council. They had once spent a good deal importing all those tons of sand from some distant world on the stargate system to cover the razor flint nature originally laid there.

What brought another of those incredible smiles was the interior. Not only did the carpeting continue up the walls, but as she walked from the kitchen, across the lounge area to the fireplace, and turned to look up at the sleeping loft, each place her feet touched a patch changed color to a pale, clear yellow. She stared, then laughed and ran her hands along the back

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of a chair. It, too, changed color, to a pattern of pastel greens and yellows.

"PolySensitives," she said. "I haven't seen any of these since I was a little girl." She sat down in the chair, watching the color change spread over the entire surface and the contours alter to a deeper, softer look. "How fun."

Unfortunately the polys were not always fun. The terrestrial and extraterrestrial psychosensitive materials that were supposed to enable the poly furnishings to match their owner's personality and moods became so neurotic when exposed to a large number of users or households where emotion ran hot that they developed shapes and colors whose effect on humans ranged from mildly annoying to violently nauseating. Polys were appropriate for Amanda, though. They could suit both her and her alter ego and eliminate any conflict over taste in furniture.

Amanda said, "I think this will be fine. Where do I sign the lease?"

That brought her alter to mind. "Will Selene be signing, too?"

The light in her dimmed, leaving her only a lanky girl in an anachronistic dress. She pulled at a copper lock dangling down over her temple. "There's no need. The courts won't recognize us as separate people. What one does is legally binding on the other."

I was dismayed by the effect the question had on her. I forced heartiness into my voice. "Then let's drive back to the office and sign. You can move in today."

Driving down the mountain, I pointed out the villas and estates of some of our celebrity citizens: actress Lillith Mannors, novelist Forrest Jakovich, and our extraterrestrial, Gepbhal Gepbhanna. I was finally rewarded by seeing the light come back on in her. At the office I explained that the owner of No. 43 would only let the cabin until May. Was that all right with her?

"I hope I'll be gone before then. I'm just on holiday until I decide what to do with my life."

I raised my brows. "You've given up being hostess for your father?"

She lowered her eyes. "My father remarried last month. He doesn't need me any longer. But a woman of twenty-six ought to be leaving home anyway."

"I'm surprised there's any problem what to do. Your dancing has already won critical acclaim."

The light in her dimmed. "Selene is the dancer. I don't know anything about it."

"But if *she* knows —" I began, then, as her light went out entirely, said, "I'm sorry; I didn't mean to upset you. I was just curious..."

"Everyone is." Her voice was not bitter but there was a flatness of

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tone that served as well.

I brought the subject back to business. "If you come to May and aren't ready to leave, I'll find you another cabin."

She tugged at the lock of hair over her temple again. "By that time it will be Selene's decision."

My curiosity reared up again. The gossip columnists speculated a great deal about how Amanda and Selene managed their dual existence, but because neither personality gave interviews on the subject, it had to remain only speculation. The custody decision, however, was public knowledge. January to June had gone to Margot Randall, July to December to the Senator. It sounded like the alters might still divide their year that way. But rather than distress Amanda further by asking about it, I bit my tongue and hurried out to get the lease from my secretary.

While Caro typed in the blanks, I wondered at the difference between Amanda Gail's attitude toward Selene and that portrayed by the columnists. They made it sound like kinky fun. Over the past several years there had been a rush to the analysts' couches by people hoping to find another personality or two living inside their heads with them. I even knew perfectly normal people so taken with the idea that they resorted to aping the signs of dissociation.

Amanda was still very quiet when I took the lease in to her. I offered her myself and my runabout to move her luggage from the cabletrain station. She accepted, and while we collected the luggage, including a huge trunk that almost filled the car, I did my best to be kind and amusing. Finally, she started glowing again. I left her with the key, my telephone number, and a warning that since the cabins on either side of her for some distance were empty she should keep her doors locked. I also promised to call her the next day to see if she needed anything.

"Not too early, please?" she said. "I like to sleep late."

"Why don't I come over at noon? We'll have lunch somewhere and I can show you the sights."

She smiled. "That sounds lovely."

I lived on the Heliomere myself, just a kilometer away from Amanda's cabin. I don't sleep late, and the next morning while I was taking my wake-up walk along the beach, I saw no reason not to pass her cabin. I could take a brief look to make sure everything was all right, then come back for her at noon as agreed. I was enjoying the frosty bite of the air in my nose and throat and the surreal effect of the steam rising off the dawn-pink Heliomere when I saw Amanda running up the beach toward me, her hair flying

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long and loose around her.

My initial spasm of panic passed as I realized she was wearing an exercise jacket and shorts and only jogging, not running. She saw me about the same moment. She spun around as though to run away, then shrugged and waited for me to catch up.

"I thought you like to sleep late," I said.

She started walking. "Mandy does."

I almost missed the next step turning to stare at her. "You're Selene?"

She did look different. She held her chin high, making her seem even taller than she had yesterday. Her eye contact was direct rather than through her lashes, and the color of her eyes themselves was less goldstone than the feral warmth of topaz. Too, despite her slow walk beside me, she radiated energy so electric it fairly raised the hair on my arm nearest her. Even her voice was changed — higher, firm, rapid.

"Are you in command today, then?" I asked.

"No." She shook her hair back over her shoulders. "I don't take over officially until January. I just come early to exercise."

I raised my brows. "That's dedication."

"That's necessity. Without daily practice I'll tighten up and my elevations will fall."

"Elevations?"

Without breaking stride, she kicked high over her head and grinned at me. "Elevations." Then she stopped and turned to face me. "I'll have to ask you for a favor. Mandy doesn't know about my practice sessions. Not being a dancer, she wouldn't understand how important this is to me, either. She'd just be upset knowing I was here out of my time. So when you take her to lunch today, please don't mention you saw me."

I frowned. "If you know I'm taking her to lunch, how is it she doesn't know what you're doing?"

"I'm continuously aware; she's only conscious when she's out."

That hardly seemed fair to me. As though she read my mind, Selene said, "I didn't plan it; it just works out that way."

She started walking toward the cabin again, leaning forward as though straining against an invisible leash. I could almost hear the crackle of contained energy within her.

"You won't tell her, will you?" she asked anxiously.

I thought about it a minute. There seemed to be no harm in Selene being here. "No, I won't tell her."

She sighed in relief. "Gordy, you're a friend. We'll meet again."

The leash broke. She bounded away down the sand. As though

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that were not release enough, she flung herself into a succession of cartwheels and forward flips. She went around a curve of the beach and out of sight, still cartwheeling. By the time I reached the curve, she had disappeared.

At noon Amanda was waiting for me out on her deck. She came down the steps toward the runabout with a regal grace so unlike Selene's bridled energy it was hard to believe they possessed the same body.

"Good morning, Mr. Gordon." She smiled, leaving me breathless. "Where are we going?"

"To a cafe called The Gallery."

Its main attraction, aside from being one of the two cafes open this month, was that while we waited for our order we could walk around the cafe looking at the paintings and sculpture on exhibition by local artists.

"You must have quite an artists' colony here," Amanda said, looking over the collection. She ran a hand down the smooth curves of a sonatrophic sculpture by Drummond Caspar. The trope leaned toward the sound of her voice.

"We do. Between them and our celebrity citizens, shopkeepers and simple businessmen like me are a minority group. Aventine is really a village with a large population."

"Then what are the sights you mentioned?"

"The most unique collection of architecture in the world."

Her goldstone eyes widened in disbelief. "Architecture?"

I grinned. "I, somewhat naturally, am a connoisseur of buildings, and I promise you, Miss Gail, that nowhere else will you find such a free exercise of idiosyncrasies in home design."

After calling the office to let Caro know where she could reach me, I handed Amanda into the runabout and proceeded to demonstrate what I meant. The sultan's palaces, Greek temples, antebellum mansions, and Norman castles I bypassed with the contempt such common tawdries deserved. Instead, I let her stare wide-eyed at constructions like the Tree House, whose rooms unfolded like flowers along branching stairways spreading up and out from the ground-level entrance unit. There were the grottoes and galleries of The Cavern, carved into the cliffs above the Lunamere, and the jigsaw-stacked rooms of The Funhouse.

"It's marvelous," Amanda said. "And people actually live in them?"

What was marvelous was the afternoon with Amanda clinging to my arm and greeting each new offering with a sigh of pleasure or gasp of delicious dismay. In the course of it she stopped calling me Mr. Gordon, too, and began saying Matthew. I would have preferred

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Matt, but when I brought that up she dropped her eyes and said:

"If you don't mind, I prefer some formality. As my father says, this modern rush to intimacy promotes sex but prevents conversation and understanding."

I did not feel ready to dispute Senator Gail. "Then I take it you don't want me to call you Mandy?"

"No!" Her vehemence startled me. She quickly lowered her voice and went on: "My friends call me Amanda."

I tried to extend the day by inviting her out for dinner as I was driving her back to her cabin.

She declined with a smile. "I really should finish unpacking."

"I can help."

She shook her head. "Thank you, anyway."

I did extract a promise that she would let me show her more houses another day; then I made myself leave. I drove home reflecting what pleasant and restful company she was. A man could do far worse than her for a companion. I wondered, too, when I might see Selene again.

There was a note from her on my door the next morning.

Gordy,

You should have insisted on dinner last night. Playing hostess for the Senator never included kitchen duty. Help Mandy get a meal subscription.

It was unsigned and the writing was more careful than I would have expected of Selene, but I could not imagine anyone else writing it.

I called Amanda at noon. Without mentioning the note, I asked about her cooking.

After a short pause she said, "I just throw things together."

I shuddered. "You need more than that. I'm going to call a food service in Gateside and take out a subscription for you; then I insist you have your meals with me, either out or cooked by me, until your first week's supply of meals is delivered."

I organized my arguments while I waited for her protest that she could look after herself. To my surprise, after another short pause, she said in a quiet voice, "You're right, of course, Matthew. Thank you for taking so much trouble for me."

Nothing was trouble which guaranteed me the chance to see her twice a day. When I met Selene on the beach several days later, I thanked her.

She shrugged, running in place while she talked to me. "Someone has to let you know when things need to be done."

She started off up the beach.

"May I run with you?" I called after her.

She looked back without stopping. "If you like. I'd like having someone besides myself to talk to. It's only fair to warn you, though.

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I'm harder to get along with than Mandy."

She was nothing if not honest. In the succeeding mornings, if I ran too slowly, she simply left me behind. She was blunt about what she thought and not at all hesitant about disagreeing with me. Still, there was no verbal swordplay and no pretense about her, which was as attractive in its way as Amanda's charming acquiescence. And I never ceased to be fascinated by the difference between Amanda's serenity and Selene's coiled-spring energy.

Selene also kept me informed on what needed to be done, either around the cabin or for Amanda. Morning after morning, she would hand me a note when I met her. I was always glad of an excuse to see more of Amanda, but I was puzzled by the notes.

"Why write?" I asked Selene.

That particular morning she was working through a set of torturous-looking exercises that made my muscles protest to watch. She never broke the rhythm of them and her voice came in gasps between stretches and bends. "Habit, I guess. I always left...notes for Mandy."

"Like these?"

"Basically. In the beginning... it was to tell her...about me, then...to let her know...who I met and what...I learned in school...my half the...year so people wouldn't...know about...us."

"When did you become two people?"

She rolled to her feet. Swinging up onto the deck, she began using the railing as a bar for ballet exercises. She shot me an amused glance. "Ever curious, aren't you, Gordy?" But before I could protest, she grinned. "We split when we were six. I told Mandy about it when we were seven, after we'd learned to read and write. Any more questions?"

"Yes. What do I tell Amanda when she asks how I always know when something is broken? You don't want me to say anything about you, but I don't want to lie to her."

Selene went on exercising. "She won't ask. People have been taking care of Mandy all her life. She takes it for granted we know what she needs." She straightened, pink with exertion. "Oh, I'd better warn you. Next week is the Senator's birthday. Mandy will be asking you to take her shopping for a gift." She blew me a theatrical kiss and disappeared inside.

Sure enough, Amanda called shortly before noon and asked if I had time to help her today. Caro looked disapproving but had to admit the appointment book was empty.

"Where can I reach you?" she

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asked as I hung up the phone.

"Somewhere in Gateside."

Caro rolled her eyes. Before she could express her opinion of running out of town on a working day, I left to pick up Amanda.

Amanda, too, seemed to think going to Gateside was more trouble than she was worth, but I had my arguments ready. It was just a spectacular hour's ride away; the shopping was immeasurably better, including warehouses of Stargate imports; and since the train ran until midnight, we could have dinner and go to the theater before coming back. That persuaded her.

By the end of the day I still thought it had been a good idea, though my feet ached from following her through what had to be every shop in Gateside before Amanda found a gift she thought worthy of her father. I requested a window table at the Beta Cygnus, where we could get some coffee and rest while we watched cafe patrons and people in the street outside.

Amanda sat back sipping her coffee with a contented smile. "I hope your business isn't suffering because of all the time you've spent on me."

"*I'd* suffer if I couldn't spend time on you."

She smiled. "You're very gallant. Oh, look."

She pointed out the window at a passing group who were sporting a rainbow of fanciful hair colors and wearing leotards and tights beneath coats thrown casually around their shoulders.

"They're probably from the Blue Orion Theatre up the street. Would you like to see the show there tonight?"

"I'd love to." She looked at me through her lashes. "I can't think when I've enjoyed another man's company as much as yours."

She was almost drowned out by a rising tide of babble at the door. I looked around to see the group from the street pouring into the cafe in loud and animated conversation with each other. One of them, a tall lithe man with hair, eye shadow, and fingernails striped fuchsia and lavender, broke off from the group and headed toward us with a grin.

"Se*lee*ne, love," he said. "What a delightful sur*prise*."

Amanda recoiled.

My chair scraped back as I stood up. "Who are you?"

He stopped, blinking at me. He looked at Amanda's horrified expression and frowned uncertainly. "Teddy — ah — that is — Gerald Theodore. Selene and I were daneing partners and cohabs in London three years ago."

"I'm not Selene," Amanda whispered.

The dancer raised a brow. "Ah — I see. You're the other one." He

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grinned at me. "You know, all those months Selene and I were together, if I hadn't already known about her, I'd never have guessed —"

"Matthew, I'd like to leave." Amanda fumbled for her cape.

I helped her to her feet and into her cape. With a hand under her elbow, I guided her out of the Beta Cygnus, leaving the dancer staring open-mouthed after us.

I flagged a cab to take us back to the cabletrain station. Amanda said nothing for the entire ride, just sat staring at her hands clenched in her lap. I put an arm around her. She stiffened momentarily at my touch, then buried her face against my shoulder. At the station, waiting for the train to come in, she sat up and began pushing at her hair.

"I'm sorry. I know it seems an inconsequential thing to go to pieces about, but every time I meet one of Selene's friends I feel like spiders are crawling over me. They're all so... grotesque." Amanda shuddered. "I don't know how she can actually live with such creatures. I suppose it's her nature. I've never let a man touch me, but she — she'll have any man who strikes her fancy, just like her mother."

I felt my brows hop. Her voice was almost vicious in tone.

"My father could have been President but for Margot Randall. The woman was rapacious, vulgar, egocentric, and totally amoral. She nearly drove my father mad before he realized there was no helping her."

I was disturbed by her vehemence and the implied criticism of Selene. "You don't know Selene is like that," I said in what I intended to be a soothing voice. "You've never met her."

"I've met her friends."

That ended the subject for her. She was quiet the remaining ride home. She reached for my hand after a few minutes, though, and held it, squeezing a bit from time to time. I was content.

At the cabin she said, "I'm sorry I was poor company."

"That's all right. Do you feel better now?"

She gave me a faint smile. "Some. You're a wonderful man, Matthew. If I didn't feel like Selene is leering over my shoulder, I'd kiss you good-night. Another time I will. Please call me tomorrow."

I drove on home wishing I could have stayed. I wondered what Selene would have to say about the incident.

Selene laughed. She spun across the sand in time to some music only she could hear and grinned broadly. "Poor Vestal Virgin. How shocking to be confronted with the possibility the temple of her body has been defiled."

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I had expected a more sympathetic reaction. I snapped, "You don't sound very sorry it happened."

She stopped in midstride with her leg in the air. She held the position a few moments, then slowly lowered the leg and hooked her hair behind her ears while fixing me with a speculative topaz gaze. Her voice was deliberate. "Why should I be? Nothing happened. Teddy is a dear thing and Mandy's archaic sensibilities are her problem, not mine."

I stared at her. "You don't like Amanda, do you?"

She considered the accusation. "I wouldn't choose her for a friend. I think she's insipid and gutless. She could have sent Teddy on his way with a few polite words instead of making an incident of it. Still, I think I pity rather than dislike her. Don't I let myself get sucked into looking after her like everyone else? That sweet, yielding dependency is no more than what her father trained into her. It's the Senator I dislike." She snorted. "Imagine a contemporary man with a nineteenth century taste in women. No wonder my mother left him." She began dancing again.

I was still angry, not ready to stop the fight yet. "She left *him?* It is my understanding that her infidelities forced him to divorce her."

The jab left her untouched. With perfect calm and not even a pause in her movement, she said, "He had the press, I believe." She spun once more and finished in a deep curtsy, then straightened and began stripping off her exercise suit. "I'm going to swim. Will you come with me?"

She threw herself into the Heliomere without looking back. After a bit I undressed and followed her. Compared to the chill of the air, the water felt boiling hot. The heat drew out the last of my anger, though. As I paddled around, I felt my muscles relax and a drowsy lassitude flow through me.

Too soon, it seemed, Selene was shouting, "Don't go to sleep, Gordy. It's time to get out."

We made the cold dash across the beach to the cabin, picking up our clothes on the way. Inside we huddled together wishing for a fire and toweled ourselves dry while the polycarpet ran rainbows of browns and electric blues around our feet. In the course of it I got my arms around Selene. I pulled her against me. She met my mouth hungrily, but when I started pulling her toward the fake animal pelt in front of the fireplace, she rammed me with a sharp hip bone and wiggled loose.

"I don't have time. I have to dry my hair before I wake Mandy."

"You never have time for any-

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thing but exercising. Will you ever?"

She licked her lips. "Ask me in January."

I walked back up the beach wondering in bemusement if I could be falling in love with two such different women at the same time. If so, how fortunate they were the same woman.

I called Amanda later. I expected to find her herself, yesterday already forgotten, but she still sounded anxious. "Matthew, can you come up?"

I looked unhappily at the couple standing in the outer office with my secretary. What a time for clients to walk in. "I have some people here. Can it possibly wait?"

There was a pause while she debated. "I guess so, but, please, come when you can."

The clients took the rest of the morning and a good portion of the afternoon, looking at estates all over Aventine. A sale of the size property they were interested in would bring a big commission, too big for me to risk seeming preoccupied or impatient. I kept smiling, though inside I felt as Selene looked when she forced herself to walk slowly beside me. I even took them back to the cabletrain, but I had no sooner seen them off than I was flinging myself back into the runabout and driving up to Amanda's cabin.

"What's wrong?" I asked, walking in.

Amanda sat wrapped in a shawl and staring into the empty fireplace. The polychair had turned pale grey. "She's trying to take over, Matthew."

I pulled another chair up beside her and sat down. "What do you mean?"

She pulled the shawl tighter around her. "When I got up this morning that chair you're sitting in was bright blue. It's always brown or yellow for you. Selene has to have been sitting in it."

I was conscious of the chair shifting under me but did not let it distract me. "Does that mean she's taking over?"

Amanda laced and unlaced her fingers in her lap. "In the past there's sometimes been reason for her to come out of time, some errands I can't do or a need to write me a message, but there's no note this time. I also found damp towels that weren't there last night. If she isn't honoring our agreement any longer, soon it won't be minutes she's taking, it will be hours, then days, until there's no time left I can count on for my own. I don't know what to do, Matthew. How can I fight her?"

"I know a psychiatrist who spends her weekends here in Aventine. Perhaps she can help."

"No!" Amanda jumped up,

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clutching her shawl around her with white-knuckled hands. "She'd only want to reintegrate me."

I stood, too, and cupped her face between my hands. "Would that be so terrible? Then all the time would be yours."

"But I'd have to become part of... what Selene is." She pulled away from me, shaking her head. "That's unthinkable. I couldn't bear it. There's no other way but to go on as I am. So promise me, Matthew, promise that if you ever see Selene, you'll tell me. I have to know when she's stealing time."

I took a deep breath and lied with a straight face. "I promise."

Amanda walked into my arms and buried her face against my neck. "Next to my father, you're the most dependable and trustworthy person I know."

If I looked as guilty as I felt, I was glad she could not see my face.

She stirred in my arms. I felt a ripple of tension in her body. She lifted her head and kissed me hard. I grabbed her shoulders and held her off at arm's length to look at her.

"Selene," I hissed. "What are you doing here?"

"I sensed you felt the two of us ought to talk." She slipped out of my hands and went to curl up in one of the chairs.

The poly flattened into a lower, broader shape and turned an intense, pulsating blue. It was odd to see Selene in Amanda's clothes, but odder yet that, despite them, she looked like herself and not Amanda. Energy ran like a restless, self-willed thing under her skin. She could not even sit without that coiled-spring tension.

"Talk, Gordy," she said.

"I'd intended to do it tomorrow. What am I supposed to tell Amanda when she comes back?"

"Tell her she fell asleep. By the way, thanks for saying nothing about me."

"Next time I'll tell her. I won't lie to her again. So I guess this will all have to stop."

She frowned. "You mean quit running together?"

"I mean quit everything: running, swimming, practicing..."

"Quit *practicing?*" Her face set. "I can't afford to stop practicing. Gordy, it's time she doesn't *use.* She hasn't missed it before, and if I'm careful not to let her catch me out again, she'll never miss it."

I shook my head. "You're breaking an agreement."

"I'm not taking over, though. You know that's just a paranoid fantasy. I use only enough time for practice and no more."

I sighed. "You seem to have all the best of it."

She snorted. "I wonder. Do you have any idea what it's like being locked up in her head for six

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months, continuously aware but able to do nothing? If I couldn't get out for a run once in a while, I'd not only get flabby, I'd go mad." She bounced out of the chair and came over to lace her fingers together behind my neck. "What about you? It's three months until January. How can I give up seeing you for three whole months?"

I did not like that idea, either, but... "What else can we do? Shall I lie to Amanda and hate you for making me do it?"

She winced. "No."

"We'll be able to see each other all we like in January."

"January." She groaned the word. "That's forever. Kiss me good-by, Gordy."

Kissing Selene was like grabbing a high-voltage wire. The charge in her swept through us both. I could almost smell the smoke from my sizzling nerve endings. And this time when I pushed her onto the pelt before the fireplace, she did not resist.

I came out of the post-coital lassitude to realize my nerves were not cauterized after all. They recognized that the room was chilling. Selene was already fastening her dress. I groped half-heartedly for my clothes.

"This would be a nice night for a fire. Shall I build one?" I asked.

Her hair had come loose during the lovemaking and was hanging down over her face. She parted it to look at me. My breathing stopped. Her eyes were goldstone.

In a voice of such preternatural calm it terrified me, Amanda said, "Who were you talking to?"

It was impossible to answer with ice in my chest. I could only stare back while she hunted around for her hairpins.

"I do hope you aren't going to say it was me, not with a chair adapted to Selene right beside you."

There appeared to be nothing I could say. I crawled into my pants.

She found the pins. Sitting down in the same chair Selene had occupied, she swept her hair up with her arms, then used one hand to hold it while she began pinning it in place. The poly turned a bright mottle of yellow and orange.

"I checked the clock," she said.

Her voice faltered only a little but her hands began to shake. The orange in the chair's color went darker and the yellows bled away. Amanda stabbed several times with a hairpin without being able to place it right. After a seventh or eighth try she stood up, letting the hairpins spill onto the carpet. She walked to the far end of the fireplace, where she stood with her back to me, toying with the tops of the fire tools. "It hasn't been long at all since — since I told you I... trusted you."

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That hurt. I climbed to my feet and reached out to touch her shoulder. "I was talking to her for your sake."

She turned. "For *my* sake? Matthew, please don't lie to me again." There were tears in her voice.

"I'm not lying. I was arguing that Selene shouldn't use any of your time."

"It was a very...short argument." Her voice began to catch. "And I find the...conclusion rather ...inconsistent." Her control was cracking. Tears spilled out of her eyes. Her hand was white on the handle of the tool caddy.

Guilt and her pain tore at me. I chased through my head for something to comfort her. "Mandy, I —"

I bit my tongue but it was too late. She shrieked like a stricken animal and came at me swinging. There was a poker in her hand.

I backed away, throwing my arms up to protect my head. Amanda might not be athletic, but she had all her released emotion and Selene's sinewy gymnastic strength behind that swing. What probably saved my life was that she did not have Selene's conscious coordination. The poker only brushed my forearm before smashing into the stone of the fireplace.

I forgot to watch out for the rebound. Pain lanced up my arm. I went down, bouncing my head off the edge of the hearth shelf as I fell.

Amanda screamed again. I tried to roll sideways but my body would not respond and I steeled myself for the second, almost surely fatal blow. But, instead, there was the thud of something dropping on the floor. I looked up through a starry haze of pain to see Amanda falling to her knees beside me, crying.

"Matthew — Matthew, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you." Her hand stroked my forehead. "It was the name you called me. I hit out at the name. I know what happened wasn't really your fault. Selene started it."

I started to frown. It hurt hellishly. There seemed to be silver wrapped around the edges of my vision, too. "Selene isn't the evil genius you think, Amanda." My voice sounded thin.

"Don't defend her. She's just like her mother, and my father told me what *she* was. Selene's been after my time ever since her mother died. Now she wants everything that makes my time worth living, too." She clutched her hands together, lacing and unlacing the fingers.

I was appalled. This kind of thinking had been going on behind her Madonna's serenity? "You can't really believe that."

"She probably let me catch the two of you making love so I'd throw

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you out and she could have you to herself." Amanda sat back hugging herself as though cold. "I know what she's doing but I don't know what to do to stop her. If she were a cancer, I could cut her out. How do I cure myself of this — this parasite of the mind?"

She stood, using an arm of a chair to help push herself to her feet. From where her hand touched, livid streamers of orange and scarlet radiated out across the surface of the poly while the shape narrowed and trembled. A marbled pool of the same colors spread from her feet into the carpet. She stood with her eyes searching the cabin as though she expected to find an answer there. Her gaze fixed on the kitchen.

"Cut her out," she said.

She ran for the kitchen, her feet leaving a path like bloody stepping stones.

"Amanda," I called.

I tried to sit up but my head weighed a thousand kilos. I managed to turn over on my side and, as though down a silver tunnel, watched Amanda jerk open a drawer. She reached in. I gritted my teeth against the nausea the effort of moving brought and lurched onto my hands and knees.

Her hand came out of the drawer with a thin knife.

"Amanda!" I crawled toward the kitchen, dragging the weight of my head with me. "Amanda, what are you doing?"

The arm of the poker had hit gave away, dropping my head and shoulders onto the carpet. The shock sent a new wave of nausea through me and muffled my vision and hearing in black velvet.

I could not have been out more than moments. When my sight cleared I was staring into polycarpet turned murky green. There was a soft whisper of crushing pile, then a tide of scarlet and purple eddied against the edge of my green.

"I'm going to cut her out, Matthew," Amanda's voice said from above me. It was low but trembling, a breath away from hysteria. "She only comes to dance. I read once about a horse whose tendons were cut just a little, but he never was able to race again."

"My god!" I could see her feet and, by rolling onto my back, look up at her rising above me toward the beams of the room, but I could not move. My head seemed nailed to the floor. The knife gleamed in her hand. "Selene," I called. "I can't reach her. Help me."

Amanda cried, "Matthew, don't —" Her eyes widened with horror. Her mouth moved again.

But this time it was Selene's voice, firm and brisk, that spoke. "I think we'd better have a talk, Mandy."

There was another twisting of

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the facial features. Amanda, her voice rising, said, "You can't do this, Selene. You're cheating."

"I can't let you ruin my dancing career."

"It's the only way I know to make you go away and leave me alone."

Amanda backed as she spoke, until she was stopped by a wall. The polycarpet extending up the surface responded to her touch with an exploding aurora of hot oranges, reds, and violets.

"I've tried living with you," Amanda said, "but it doesn't work. Now I won't have anything more to do with you!"

"You have no choice." Tendrils of green and blue wormed their way into the pattern. "I'm as much a part of this body as you are. Hamstring me and we'll just both be cripples."

Scarlet wiped out the blues and greens. Amanda cried, "Let's see."

She swooped toward her ankles with the knife. The long skirt of her dress hung in the way. Before she could pick up the hem, her left hand stiffened.

"No," she screamed. "Selene, let go of my hand!"

Behind the left shoulder the polycarpet turned bright blue. The left hand reached for the right wrist.

Amanda wrenched herself sideways, stabbing at the left hand. "Leave me alone."

The left hand dodged. "You don't seem to understand, Mandy — I can't. We're joined indissolubly, till death us do part," Selene said.

"All right!"

The knife turned toward her own chest. Selene's hand leaped to intercept, closing on Amanda's wrist. Amanda screamed inarticulately. Her whole body convulsed with the effort to tear loose. Selene held on. Slowly, Selene twisted the wrist back and down while the poly around them swirled in wave after wave of color pulsating with every labored breath of the struggling body. The maelstrom spread out across the floor and up the walls, even affected the chairs so that they, too, raged with color and pulsed to the time of Amanda's breathing.

Amanda's wrist bent back farther. Her fingers fought to hold on to the knife, but with each moment they loosed more.

Amanda sobbed. "I'm going to kill you, Selene. Sooner or later, I'll kill you."

"No." Selene's voice came through clenched teeth. "I won't allow that, Mandy. And I won't retire. You'll just have to live with me as always."

"I won't. I can't bear it." Amanda screamed once more as the knife dropped from her fingers.

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Selene sent it out of reach with a swift kick of her left foot. "You'll have to learn."

"Selene," I said, "don't push too hard."

Amanda was looking wild, her eyes darting around like those of a trapped animal.

"You're stuck, Mandy," Selene said. "There's no way out."

"No, no, no, no."

I was terrified by the desperation in Amanda's wail. "Selene, stop it!"

But she went on relentlessly, deaf to me. "We have to live together all our lives, Mandy. No matter how much you hate it, you're already a part of me, and I of you."

Amanda whimpered and fell silent.

The next moment it was Selene, wholly Selene, who stood there. She hurried across the room and knelt beside me. "Are you all right? You've got blood all over your head."

I grabbed her wrist. "Never mind me. How's Amanda?"

She snapped her wrist loose and stood. "You need a doctor." She turned toward the phone.

"What about Amanda?"

Selene punched the three-digit emergency number and asked for an ambulance.

"Selene, *where is Amanda?*"

Selene hung up the phone. "She's gone."

"Gone?" I sat bolt upright. A wave of dizziness knocked me flat again. "How can she be gone?"

"It was an intolerable situation for her. She went catatonic to escape."

Relief flooded me. "Then she's still alive."

"But I can't reach her. She won't respond to anything I do."

"Haven't you done enough?" I sighed. "When I called you, I didn't mean for you to push her like that. Couldn't you guess what she might do? We'll call my psychiatrist friend and have her help bring Amanda back."

Selene moved around the room, touching the chairs, working her bare feet through the carpet, soothing away the bizarre reflections of the struggle. Gradually, the chairs and carpet softened to bright blue.

"Selene, did you hear me?"

She stopped moving. "I heard, Gordy."

"Then will you call my friend?"

She did not move or answer.

"Selene!"

She looked down at me with clouded topaz eyes. "I'll... think about it."

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Gordon Eklund's last story here was "Hellas Is Florida" (with Gregory Benford). His new tale does something stunningly different with one of the great sf themes, first contact between human and alien.

Points Of Contact

by GORDON EKLUND

Initial facts:

Near the burned-out, pulsating husk of Neutron Star Vt29, two interstellar spacecraft simultaneously wink into existence. Whether this unprecedented event is coincidental or not cannot initially be determined. What appears certain is that both ships have visited this point in space intending to use Vt29 as a gravitational nexus for subsequent subspace flight.

One of the two ships is a conventional spacetug, the *Virdiana*, operated by the Federated Planetary Lines of Earth and commissioned to perform certain specified short interstellar voyages. The second craft, however, is totally alien in design. Its shape resembles that of a winding snake. The hull, which is colored a luminescent shade of purple, appears to be wholly without seams of any kind.

The two ships approach, meet, and lock.

This event seems to represent the first known contact between intelligent human and nonhuman species. The date, on the old calendar, is July 24, 2340.

Captain Fritz Scheffer, Federated Planetary Lines of Earth:

I figure the wisest course is to keep the whole damn situation a secret between me and the ship's computers till the aliens force my hand by bringing their ship right up to the *Virdiana* and locking hulls.

The awesome responsibility of what is happening lies wholly on my shoulders. I've tried to avoid panic among the passengers and crew but figure, with this latest news, I've got no choice except to tell them exactly where we stand.

For that reason, I gather the lot of them in the central gameroom. Wearing a calm expression, as if this was just another dull day in

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normspace, I look them over. There's Forbes, who I hear is rich enough to buy this tug fifty thousand times over, and Chapman, a kid scientist on his way to teach in the spiral belt. Those two are the only paying passengers this trip, but I've also got a religious fanatic on board — his name is Bold or Kold — who got his way paid out of pity by Forbes, who by now can't stand the sight of the whimpering bastard. And there's also Megan, my whore, but she's as useless out of bed as she is useful within. I figure, if something's going to get done, I'll be the one man doing it.

Still, I leave nothing out of my story: "We've got an alien spacecraft locked to our hull this moment and it doesn't much look like they plan on going away soon. Mankind's been traveling through space for three hundred years, give or take a couple, and I know from personal experience we've been finding traces of these damned aliens all that time. For reasons I'm not going to try to guess, they've lit on us to make first contact with. I figure there's two possibilities with them: a lot of trouble or a hell of a lot more trouble. For that reason, I'm going down to the airlock alone." I detect their immense relief at the announcement and am not much surprised to find them cowardly. "If I don't come back, you're on your own."

Forbes, with all his loot, bleats the loudest: "Captain, please, your greatest responsibility should be to your passengers and crew."

"My greatest responsibility," I tell him proudly, "is to the human race as a whole."

Forbes wants to fight me on that, too, but the kid scientist, Chapman, wants to play sly: "Before you go, shouldn't you attempt to quickradio the nearest inhabited system? There's no good reason for us attempting to handle an event of this magnitude by ourselves."

I give him a glare for trying to act smart. "There's a pile of good reasons," I say, "but the main one is the aliens aren't dumb. They've scrambled our communicator."

"Then they're technologically adept?"

"That's correct, son."

The monk goes nuts then. I curse myself for not having anticipated. It's always the same with these fanatics. Their gods don't do them a heck of a lot of good when the waves run rough. With no choice, I clip his jaw. I get sprayed with spittle but he goes down.

"Any more of you want to dispute my position?" I double both fists and glare like hell.

Silence.

"Then I'm going down."

"Fritz, don't forget this." It's Megan, with my blaster.

I stroke her bare breast. "Hon-

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ey, I didn't intend to."

In the lock, I admit, there's sweat on my palms, suit or no suit. I can clearly see the door to their ship and the metal is a funny kind that seems to glow and pulse like a dying candle. Sure, I'm hoping for something vaguely human, but when the lock cycles, I get a monster.

It wobbles toward me. Fourteen feet high, no suit, pink skin with patches of purple fur. I count three eyes waving on foot-long tendrils, and there's a beak like a parrot's and slime all over the body. I tense my gut muscles to hold down my supper and pretend that I am unmoved.

The alien's got some sort of electric device dangling from one paw. I focus my eyes there and say, damn cool, "I am Captain Fritz Scheffer of the human race and this is my ship, the *Virdiana.*"

The thing speaks and the words are Terran, but then I realize the voice is actually coming from the electric device — some sort of translating gizmo? — rather than from the beak itself. "We have come to meet and greet your race and seek bearings to your homeworld."

I go quickly sly on him. "How come?"

His voice is as smooth as a good fuck: "In our travels we have met other intelligent species in fellowship and good will."

The one thing I have no intention of doing is sending a shipload of these things steaming toward Earth. "That may be good enough for them but not for us."

What I've been expecting all along now occurs. The monster swings his electric device up toward my face. It must be a two-in-one package: translating gizmo and killer weapon.

My blaster is poised long before. *Huummmm.* The monster goes down, his guts burned away.

I add his skull to the pile of ash — God knows how to kill a thing like that — then enter his ship. Blaster poised, I prowl the corridors. It's like climbing through the belly of a snake. There's curves where there ought to be right angles and everything is distorted. In the end, I count seven of them. All get burned.

Back aboard the *Virdiana* I'm greeted in the gameroom with the sort of reception a hero always gets from the cowards who stay behind. I report nonetheless: "The aliens were attempting to use us as part of a plot to conquer Earth and the federated worlds. Fortunately, I saw through what was happening and blasted the bunch. Now we take their ship, turn it over to the authorities, and hope the navy can ferret out their homeworld. I tell you I'd like to be on that ride."

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The rest want to chatter but I slip away and give Megan the high sign. In my stateroom, her thighs are open like a flower to the rain. I ram it deep while she pants and hollers.

Kold, Brother to the Order of the Vedic Lords:

The poor ship's captain, no longer a young fellow, trembles from the dread of the great unknown. "I tried to keep away from them," he tells us during the course of a meeting in the ship's gameroom (the irony of that location is not lost on me), "but where the hell could I go? They chased us and chased us and now they've caught us. I just don't know what to do."

"We may need weapons," says Mr. Forbes, who from a well of deep guilt has contracted for my passage. "If there's going to be a fight, I want to go down swinging."

"We could barricade the lock and hope for the best," says Chapman, an unfortunate scientist.

"Can't the computers protect us?" says Megan, doomed to a life of whoredom.

"Captain," I say, using that term because I know it will touch the poor man on a deeper level of pride, "I believe such actions as those suggested are quite unnecessary."

His fear clouds his face like the darkness before a storm. "But they could kill us, son."

"But why?" I let the corners of my mouth rise slowly, then turn my head so that all can observe my tranquil visage. "They may hate us, but they may also love us. Shall we not try love before descending into hate?"

"I — I —" They remain uncertain, but my words have reached them. The eyes of all four beseech me to proceed.

"I alone will repair to the airlock to greet our new companions," I suggest. "If, as I fervently believe, the god of the void is a universal force, then we have nothing to fear."

Still, they hesitate.

"If love cannot conquer the unknown, then life is not worth enduring," I say.

The captain speaks for all of them: "Then go as you wish, son, and may God be with you."

"He is, my friend," I say.

As I wait between the airlock doors, I focus less upon the differences that may separate my race from that of the aliens and more upon our universal similarities. If true absolutes exist within the cosmic sphere, then distinctions cannot be said to rule. The term "alien" is itself a lie. There are no aliens — only brothers.

I concentrate upon the truth of these words and fix my gaze to the opposite door. As if in reply, the

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metal glows brightly. I bow my head in prayer.

The door slides suddenly open and the creature appears. I step forward and hold out my hand. "I am Kold, child of the universal order. May I welcome you to this moment of endless time?"

I gaze into white eyes that seem to see all at once. A silver sheen covers the perfect body like the glow of a halo. "I am Norda," he says.

"And we are one."

He nods. "We are all together."

In sheer ecstasy, I discard my clothes. Norda and I embrace and hug.

Falling to one knee, I pound my head against the hard floor, proclaiming for all to hear the glory of the gods and the good fortune of mankind.

Norda draws me to my feet. His touch ripples my soul like a bolt of yellow lightning. His voice sings rather than speaks: "My friend, Kold, we are brothers throughout the infinite realms of time and space. I bring you glad tidings from the brothers of a million burning suns. Your people and mine shall live as one. We share love, kindness, charity, devotion, detachment, and joy. Come, let us speak together."

"But are we worthy?" I cannot help asking.

His laughter is as one with the thunder of the gods. "My child, each finite speck in the cosmic wilderness is born of equal worth. Are we not all products of the Singular Void. It is within us, and we are within it."

The tears rush down my face as I hear these words of truth.

I draw him toward the lock behind. "Come and meet my sister and brothers," I say. "They must hear these words you speak, for all are filled with fear and dread and have need to be loved."

He smiles benevolently. "They are my brothers and sister as well."

"Yes," I say, joyously, "they are yours, too."

The others, seeing my new brother, sense the import of the message he bears. Falling to their knees as one, they weep the tears of the damned and saved.

I think: man has at last achieved that destiny for which he has so long strained; the riches of the universe are ours at last to plunder.

I am weeping with my brothers and sister.

Oh Lord, my God of gods in heaven, how good You are to us this day!

Megan, prostitute:

I know the second old Fritz Scheffer toots the honker for a gameroom meeting that something weird must be afoot, because Schef-

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fer is your typical spacetug captain in the sense that all he's interested in during a voyage is drinking and sleeping and chatting with his computers. He's untypical in the sense that he seems to like me better as a man than as a lady (my preference is the opposite), but I figure that comes from his past navy service, when he was cooped up in those big ships for years at a time with nothing on board to play with except things just like his own. (This would be before my profession was made a mandatory element in every scheduled cargo.) I don't mind the interruption to the monotony too much. This whole voyage has been largely a bust for me, except for the kid Chapman, who isn't that young but seems younger. Still, he fucks conventionally and quickly and tips big, seeming to think the more money he spreads the more I'll be impressed by his prowess (which isn't, superficially, that far from the truth). What I won't do is divulge for him the ageless secret of my profession, namely that every man or woman's thing is pretty much the same as the next in line, and, if pressed, I'd be lucky to remember one time over another. It's not an art, it's a simple biological urge, as is shitting, and I don't remember those, either.

So here we all are gathered in the gameroom and Scheffer is running off about an alien ship that's chased us around the system and caught us and won't let us go. I sit calmly back, cross my legs (being a woman makes that simpler to perform), and yawn a big one. The other four are going crazy, ranting and raving with fear and so on. They seem to think somebody has to go down to the airlock and confront these aliens, but the big question is who. Scheffer says it shouldn't be him because, if he gets killed, there's no one to save us. Forbes, who is some sort of millionaire and probably impotent, because he's made no move toward me the whole voyage, says if he dies, half the inhabited galaxy goes down with him. The funny monk, Kold, who begged his way on board, just keeps murmuring, "OM," which probably means *not me.* As for my boy Chapman, he's got it down to the last letter: "Perhaps, because of my scientific experience, I should be the one to go, but frankly my life has been physics, the outer rather than the inner universe, and I feel what is needed now is a whole and true human being, a real representative of our race."

Hey, I've got to laugh now. What the hell? They're all looking at me.

So I spit. "What the fuck, I'm not getting rich sitting on my ass, I'll go have a chat."

Scheffer, eager as a pup after slipping loose of the noose, runs

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and fetches me a suit, then sticks me inside the lock. Standing there, I think how I've been bounced on my rump four million times but never failed to land on my feet. The door in front of me is made of a funny, glittering kind of metal that tickles when I touch it.

The door dilates like an eyeball in the dark, and this alien steps through.

The first thing I notice is that he's a male. That's because he's nine feet tall and as naked as a baby seal.

"Welcome to the human race," I say, speaking through my suit radio.

"But you are?" He speaks Terran like a king, so I figure they've been studying us from a distance for some time.

"Megan," I say. "I'm a whore."

That makes him grin. His teeth are blue like water in a lake, but somehow I'm not disturbed. Pretty soon, we're sitting down face-to-face, and I notice for the first time that he's got a third eye — green as a dragon — square in the middle of his forehead. "My name is —" he gurgles something I couldn't ever repeat "— and my people are —" another gurgle. "For some centuries, we have been observing your race from a distance, but I — I —" He stutters like a little kid. "I love you," he finishes, to my sheer amazement.

I want to say *bullshit,* having heard that line plenty of times before, but something in the way he winks that third eye makes me realize he's sincere. "How come?" I ask instead.

"Because you know more about the arts and sciences of the senses than I can hope to learn in a lifetime."

I have to admit that I like him, too. "I could try teaching you," I suggest.

"That would be kind."

So he takes me right there. My suit is off in a flash and I'm humping on my rump and he's got a thing that would look big on a bull moose.

For the first time in my life, I come like crazy.

And he isn't stopping. I come all over again.

In the end, we're laying on the floor with his hand covering my breast (and it's not a small one, either), and he whispers, throatily, "Megan, there is no place for one such as you with such meager beasts as your humans. Return with me to —" he gurgles "— and learn to live as one of your talents should."

I give his proposal a microsecond of serious consideration: "Let's go."

As we slip through the airlock hand-in-hand, I can't help wondering: how in the hell will old Scheffer

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ever explain this one to the board of inquiry?

On board the alien ship, I find that my new friend isn't alone. He's got five pals aboard and each one feels the same about me.

I'm beginning to think I've found heaven at last.

Roger Chapman, Doctor of Philosphy and Science:

It is a constant source of personal amazement that so many people fear the unknown. As Captain Scheffer speaks, I recall how some years ago while investigating a black hole in the region of Nova 49, the captain who had ferried me there became so fearful of that tiny dark enigma that I was forced to take personal control of the ship in order to draw close enough to investigate the hole. "We can't fall in, you idiot," I told him, "because the concept is physically impossible in a free gravity environment." Still, the captain continued to shake and quiver. He wasn't simply an idiot, either, though he was surely that; unfortunately, he happened to be a rather typical spacecraft captain.

Aboard the tug *Virdiana,* near the influence of Neutron Star Vt29, the aging Captain Fritz Scheffer tells us about the strange, presumably alien starship that has recently made rendezvous with our ship. I listen carefully to his words, attempting to separate the raw facts from the blind emotions and regretting that I lack access to the ship's computers. When the captain finishes his rambling dissertation, my fellow passengers immediately begin babbling. I permit them enough time to vent their obvious fears, then move to intercede.

"Gentlemen," I say, "the problem involved here has been considered, pondered, and evaluated for more than three centuries. I have personally perused monographs concerning possible first contact which date back well before the dawn of the space age. Put simply, we've known for a long time that man is not alone in the universe. The only question remaining is, now that we have met, what is the best method for establishing meaningful communication. I believe that I, perhaps better than any of you, know how to handle the situation as it presently exists."

I see that I have them securely in my grip. I am their acknowledged leader now, and it is not a position I can very well refuse. I shudder to think what might have occurred had I somehow managed to miss this flight: a bald-headed fanatic, a bisexual prostitute, a petty exploiter, and an idiotic spacetug captain. What a group to confront mankind's first nonhuman species!

With their attention riveted upon me, I request a suit.

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Alone in the airlock, I carefully examine the opposite door and determine that it is largely formed from a metal unknown to human science, possibly some type of synthetic alloy. Immediately, from this clue alone, I am able to deduce a significant fact: this race is an older and superior one to my own.

I am given little time in which to mull over such thoughts, as the airlock door spirals open and a figure emerges. The alien wears a pressure suit and helmet similar in design to mine. I find him bipedal, with facial features basically human. His nostrils appear recessed, there seems to be no facial hair, and his ears are absent. From these clues, I confirm my original theory: this being is clearly superior evolutionarily as well as technologically.

From somewhere inside his suit, the alien produces a writing pad and lead pencil. I accept these articles and, with a hand, suggest that we sit. Then, on the top sheet of the writing pad, I make a neat series of ten dots. Above each in turn, I write the numbers from one to ten. The alien, taking the pad away from me, scribbles a symbol of his own above each of mine. With such communication so quickly established, I cannot help smiling inwardly. Events so far have proceeded exactly according to plan.

Using both dots and symbols, I then make the number 3.1416. The alien studies what I have accomplished, then suddenly puckers his lips. I accept this gesture as a positive one and proceed (again using both dots and numbers) to write out the square roots for the numbers from two to ten. The alien rewards my effort with yet another puckering of his lips. Mathematics stands as the only truly universal language, and I long ago conjectured that any technologically advanced race must be aware of this fact.

With basic communication established, I now move on to a second step. Tapping my heart and head with a finger, I say, "Man."

The alien, indicating himself, replies (as well as I can determine): "Nowak."

Pointing to him, I repeat, "Nowak."

Pointing to me, the alien says, "Man."

Glorious!

By the time the alien and I separate, we possess a common vocabulary grown to nine words. When I eventually return to the gameroom where the others await me, I am barely permitted to shed my suit. Captain Scheffer grabs my arm and demands, "Well, how did it go? Was there trouble? What did the damn thing look like? Was it a monster?"

"No more than we are," I tell him. "As for the mission itself," I

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add, glowing with what I do not feel is an excess of pride, "I can only describe it as a total success. From now on, man is no longer alone in this universe."

Andrew J. Forbes, President, Forbes Galactic Industries:

My first thought on hearing the captain's garbled description of how an alien ship has waylaid us is almost automatic: "I wonder what the hell they want."

My blunt reaction is sharp enough to grab their attention. Idealists, fools, and children. The little bald boy pawed me at the spaceport till I finally promised to pay his passage to some distant monastery. The fat physicist spent a whole evening telling me his credits till I finally lost patience and shut him up by describing a recent process developed within my firm for extracting heavy metals from the raw interiors of dwarf stars; the man didn't know a damn thing about it. As for the whore, I took a shot at her the first night and she laid underneath me like a pile of wet mud; she should have taken lessons from my fourteen-year-old daughter. The less said about the poor captain, the better: the man's a drunk and that's one of his better points.

"What makes you so certain they want anything from us at all?" the physicist asks, in a burst of adolescent naivete. "We're intelligent and they're intelligent. So why shouldn't they want to contact us?"

"Because you're an idiot," I say. "If you'd kept up with your literature, you'd know damn well these fellows have been keeping an eye on us for several centuries. Don't think it's a goddamned coincidence they happen to show their faces right now when I'm aboard this ship."

"You think they're after you, Mr. Forbes," says the whore, wide-eyed like a virgin.

"I'm not that much of an egotist. They're not after me as a person — they're after something I know."

"What?" asks the captain.

"That's what I damn well intend to find out."

He wants to put a pressure suit on me, but I say the hell with that. If the aliens want to meet me, they're going to do it on my terms, and that includes breathing my air. I'm nobody's goddamn fool. You don't win a war fighting on the other guy's terrain, and to me any business deal, with an alien or not, is pure and simple war.

In the airlock, I await the arrival of the alien or aliens with a steady gaze and tight mind. When the thing finally shows up, I refuse to bat an eye. It's squat, ugly, and hairless, with shrunken limbs, a big head, and eyes like curdled milk.

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I know the way to win is to speak first. I do so, using Terran: "I'm Forbes. If you want to talk to me, here I am."

The thing's got a face about as flat and emotive as a squashed pancake. I know this isn't going to be easy. I've got to guess what he's thinking. He speaks (in Terran): "We are aware, sir, of your status among members of your race and that you are in private possession of certain —"

I interrupt: "Then you know I'm not in the habit of giving anything away."

I catch the first flicker of an expression on his face but still can't quite read it. "We expect nothing of the kind, sir. However, it has recently come to our attention that your firm has developed a process allowing you to tap the interior cores of dwarf stars for certain heavy metals. As a matter of fact, our spacecraft have need of —"

I cut him off once more. In any bargain, the winner must always take the lead; only a fool ever follows. "I've got what you want. The question is, what are you offering in return?"

Again, I spy that vague flicker of expression that may be amusement or fear or simple slyness. He says, "Our race possesses many secrets that will be new to you. As a bargaining point, I am permitted to offer —"

"Nope." I shake my head with finality.

This time I know he's scared — or at least worried. "But, Mr. Forbes, surely you can't refuse my —"

"Your ship. That's what I want. Your ship for our ship, and I'll throw in the extraction process gratis."

I've got his white eyes shifting and darting. He's shocked and confused but I know this much: his people aren't so damn far ahead of us that there's apt to be anything on board that ship that my scientists can't duplicate in a couple years. I figure by now he knows that, too, and his continued hesitancy shows me I'm right. The only question left unanswered is simply this: how badly do they need the dwarf extraction process? I'm trying to strike the toughest possible bargain, but what have I got to lose? If he says no, I'm a rich man; if he says yes, I'm a hell of a lot richer.

He says, with an almost human sigh, "We will exchange spacecraft."

I try not to gloat. "I'll give you the documents relating to the extraction process as soon as the exchange is accomplished."

He sticks out a tepid hand. "It is agreed."

I shake, without showing my disgust. "You bet it is."

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Needless to say, when the time comes to hand over the documents, I retain a crucial page. It's running a hell of a risk, but I didn't get rich avoiding a gamble.

The alien fails to notice the discrepancy.

Laughing to beat holy hell, I tell Captain Scheffer to get out of this neck of the galaxy as quick as a whistle. The alien subspace drive is different from ours, but the controls used to operate the ship are pretty much the same.

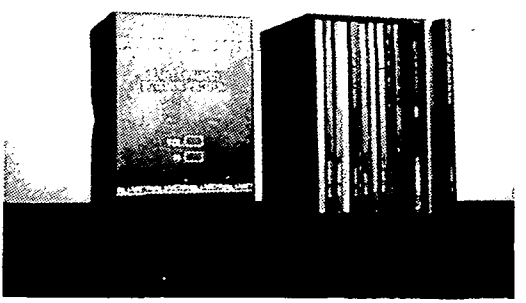
Soon enough, we're flying.

I pull the whore into my new stateroom. She's still not worth much of a damn, but the alien surroundings seem to inspire her.

Final facts:

The two starships, human and alien, remain locked for only a brief microsecond in time. There is no physical contact between members of the crews of the two ships. With a subdued flash, the alien ship quickly winks out of existence.

Aboard the *Virdiana,* the passengers and crew go about their normal duties. None retains any recollection of the circumstances surrounding the first brief contact between human and nonhuman races.



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THE BIG TIME

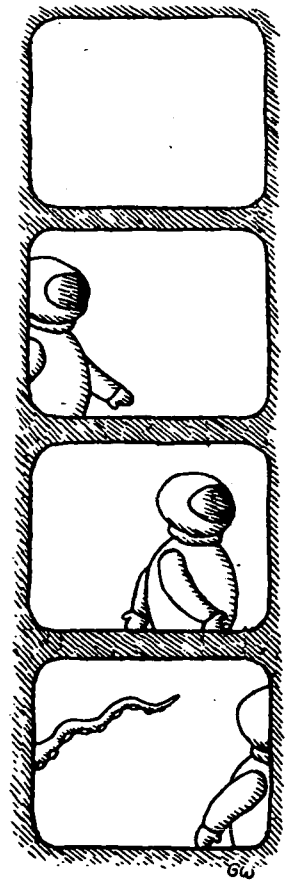
Apologies to Fritz Leiber for (mis)appropriating the title of his splendid book (one of the most filmworthy or teleplayworthy of all science fiction, incidentally), but science fiction, or at least science fiction film, has indeed made the big time. There was a TV special devoted to the 5th annual awards of the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Films.

Information on the first four annual etcs. has not worked its way to the East Coast, so I'm afraid I can't fill you in on them. Apparently the Academy doesn't have much in the way of a publicist; not much, that is, except for the ability to get the awards on TV in this Year of the S/F Film.

One of the contributing factors to the decline of quality of programming on television in the past few years has been the proliferation of "award" shows, by now almost as many and as mindless as game shows. The Oscars are fun; they have a tradition, they are live and therefore have a certain spontaneity, and even if you don't take them seriously, you can always giggle, throw popcorn around and make remarks about how people look. The Emmies, Tonies and Grammies, reflecting their various

BAIRD SEARLES

Films and Television



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fields, are respectively chaotic, provincial and witless. And the list goes on and down from there; the other award shows are merely excuses to provide bucks or publicity for the "stars" who are on the giving or receiving ends.

In this particular case, there at least seemed to be a basic sensibility at work, because of the subgenre grouping and differentiation of science fiction, fantasy and horror (though in defining them, hostess Karen Black assured us that fantasy was "light" and "whimsical," obviously never having heard of Tolkien, much less Peake, McKillip or Eddison or even Robert Howard — *Conan, the Cute?*).

But the show was a typical low-budget award "special" (shown in my area on the sleaziest of the 7 VHF channels) which couldn't have been anything but an embarrassment to those involved (to give them all the benefit of the doubt). I have 5 pages of notes scrawled hastily in the dark or by the light of commercials (of which there were many). I may even be able to decipher them.

The show opened with a flash of lightning like those "Chiller Diller Theater" logos on TV; then came a portentous voice telling us that we were not alone (only the first of a lot of pseudo-clever lead-ins and -outs to and from commercials, none of which I had the stomach to take down); next that annoying *Close Encounters* theme which sounds for all the world like a Czerny piano exercise, that may or may not have led into a group of dancers in varied costumes writhing in quasi-discotheque style on a slightly cramped stage. The varied costumes were supposedly representing the theme of the evening — I spotted a Dracula, Superman, two BEMs and a fairy (the light and whimsical kind of fairy, of course). It was very tacky.

From there the usual pattern was observed. A host and hostess, in this case William Shatner, whose place in our hearts is of course preassured, and Karen Black, whose connection with the genre is vague, but who is certainly the only actress who has made a career of convergent strabismus (well, the Mayas found it attractive).

Then two by two, like Noah's ark, the presenters appeared. But with a few exceptions, what an odd world this would be if these had been our post-flood progenitors. Mark Hamill and Buster Crabbe; Melinda Dillon and Lord Darth Vader (the first time to my knowledge that a character rather than a person has done the presenting on an awards show); Stan Frieberg and a puppet who emerged from hand-held flying saucer; Ray Bradbury (What! A literary figure? Well, he has recently made the statement that *Close Encounters* is

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the greatest or one of the greatest films ever made, so we know where *his* head is at these days) and an oversized robot; Richard (*Quark*) Benjamin and Paula (Stepford Wives) Prentiss (now there would be some worthwhile progeny if they had her looks and her talent); Wolfman Jack and a puppet drag named Madam; and Buzz Aldrin and Charles Conrad.

Charlton Heston, befitting his exalted status, presented alone.

We kept getting short excerpts from the films that were nominated; since the field is still pretty sparse, there was a certain amount of repetitiveness and barrel-bottom-scraping.

When it comes down to who won what with what for what, my notes get pretty incoherent, but so far as I can tell, *Star Wars* pretty much swept the field with awards for special effects, supporting actor (Alec Guinness), best costumes, best writer, and best science fiction film (and maybe best music, but it was there my notes went totally to pieces because of something I'll bring up later).

Now this does show a certain amount of taste on the part of the members of the Academy. Or maybe that should be rephrased to say that the fact that *Close Encounters* came off without much of anything shows a certain amount of taste, since otherwise the other contenders were such sterling achievements as *The Island of Dr. Moreau, Empire of the Ants* (which so far as I know, never showed around here) and *Kingdom of the Spiders* (ditto).

The best fantasy film was *Oh, God!* (light and whimsical, remember); best horror film, *The Little Girl Who Lives Down the Lane.*

Perhaps the most — er — unearthly part of the evening (and where my notes broke down utterly) was William Shatner doing a monologue of the words of Elton John's *Rocket Man*, with some snappy camera work showing us the three faces of Bill.

The evening concluded with previews of (read that promos for) some upcoming films. We have to look forward to: *The Incredible Melting Man* (I'm sure I heard that right); *Island of the Damned; Meteor!; The Swarm;* and a color version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers.* Also included for some reason were scenes from Ray Harryhausen's wonderful *Jason and the Argonauts*, made in 1963.

Oh, yes, the award. So far as I could see, it looked like a gold-plated Saturn on a stick.

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A fresh twist on a classic fantasy theme from Frank Sisk, who tells us that he was "born an aeon ago, now resides in Lyme, Connecticut, where he is regarded by his neighbors as a figure of hoary eccentricity." He has written a book about the Marine Corps in WW 2 and approximately 200 articles and short stories for such magazines as American Mercury, Penthouse, Ellery Queen's *and* Satevepost.

The Leech

by FRANK SISK

Miss Hattie Hopkins didn't advertise. It wasn't really necessary.

In these small Southern towns, whenever something special materializes, word of mouth always does the job of selling it. And three months after Miss Hopkins had acquired the old Conway property, rehabilitated it and moved in, a coterie of misguided creatures was regularly beseeching her alleged wizardry as a teller of fortunes.

Miss Hopkins appeared to be in her late forties. She wore her gray-flecked auburn hair in a large loose bun which accentuated the pallor of a long face that would have been plain except for glowing green eyes and the avid protrusion of the upper front teeth.

She claimed to have originated in Summerville, South Carolina. Nobody bothered to verify this until, certain suspicions justifiably aroused, I did.

Buried somewhere in our town hall's musty vault is an old ordinance that requires licensing of anyone who wishes to practice necromancy, dowsing, palm reading, crystal gazing or fortune telling. The penalty for practicing these occult arts without a licence is a fine of ten dollars or thirty days on the chain gang. In my long memory this ordinance has been invoked only once, and that was a case less judicial than prejudicial against a company of gypsies who set up a soothsayer tent just outside the grounds during a county fair.

On that score, obviously, Miss Hopkins was in no danger of being prosecuted. Besides, as I soon learned, she performed her services gratuitously — as a social lark, one might say.

So it wasn't her exercises with cards or tea leaves that concerned me. Being a physician and county health officer, I normally paid no attention to human peccadillos un-

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less they caused disease. Miss Hopkins' diversion at first seemed harmless enough, and it was not until she began to trespass upon my province that I took serious note of her.

It was Maybelle Cummings, a well-off widow and incurable hypochondriac, who inadvertently apprised me that our seeress was stepping on my toes. Maybelle was in the office for her quarterly blood-sugar analysis. Since her husband's death she had added a fear of diabetes to a long list of ailments keyed to intensive migraines.

After drawing from her plump right arm a 300-cc component of blood, twice as much as was absolutely needed for the lab test, I laid a doctorly palm across her fretful forehead and said:

"Those mean migraines still with you, Maybelle?"

"They lettin up some, Doc."

"So you've finally started doing the little workouts I prescribed."

"No such thing."

"Well, then —"

"Y'awl pardon my English, Doc, but you medicine men don't have *all* the cures."

"I guess not. What kind of magic remedy have you discovered now, Maybelle?"

"I ain't none too sure I oughten to say."

"The secret's safe with me."

"Oh, I don't know now."

"Come on, Maybelle. Don't try teasing old Dr. Devlin."

She heaved a sigh and then, raising puffy hands to her temples, pushed back several thick strands of pink-dyed hair. "Okay, Doc. Lookit here."

Adjusting the overhead light, I leaned forward. Each temple bore a small Y-shaped mark, still faintly livid.

"What you make of that, you s'all-fired smart?" she said smugly.

I recognized the marks as those left by the three jaws of a blood-sucking leech.

"Well, I make out that you've found yourself a quack," I said.

"I found a person give me relief from them terrible headaches," she retorted. "Which is more'n I ever found here."

"Thanks for the compliment."

"You're welcome and so's your aspirin."

"Tell me, Maybelle, what's the going rate these days for a session of phlebotomy?"

"A session of *what?*"

"Phlebotomy. In plain English, bloodletting. What do you pay for letting leeches suck your blood?"

"I do declare, Doc, you got a nasty way of puttin' things. Why, them little chiggers don't hurt a mite, and they right off get me shet of them headaches."

"How much a whack, Maybelle?"

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"Not a blamed cent."

"Cheap enough."

"A smart cheaper than you and your big needle."

"Who's the quack?"

"Miss Hattie Hopkins, if you must know. And she ain't no quack neither. Just a good friend with a helpin' hand."

It's been years since I kept leeches. During the early days, when I first settled here, I used them occasionally in the treatment of polycythemia, a condition caused by overproduction of red blood cells. To prevent the thickening blood from forming clots, a few good leeches were often effective. There are now drugs on the market that do the trick much better.

Maybelle Cummings was perfectly correct in stating that leeches perform their task painlessly. These small aquatic annelids (some, blood-surfeited, become twenty centimeters long) emit with their saliva an anesthetic which totally desensitizes the area to be penetrated by the needlelike teeth. At the same time the wound is injected with an element called hirudin. This expands the blood vessel and acts as an anticoagulant.

Sleeping mammals, some as large as rabbits, overtaken by leeches, have been sucked fatally dry without ever waking.

But, as I say, I haven't used the things in years because new drugs make them an anachronism. Besides, I'm afraid that this time-honored means of bloodletting, if employed nowadays by a licensed doctor even for a sound reason, would generate much morbid gossip. So it's wiser to abide by the piston syringe, acceptable to most people.

James P. Upson entered the office a few mornings after the Maybelle Cummings visit. Right away I noticed his nose.

James P. had inherited the largest of the town's three banks from a stern psalm-singing father. From another ancestor he'd acquired a taste for bonded bourbon and backroom politics. Now, a well-seasoned sixty, he could look back (somewhat blearily most of the time) to a career of public service which included being mayor, tax collector, town clerk and assessor, more or less in that order.

Over the years his nose had gradually ripened into a large lavender bulb worthy of an Avignon monk's during the time of the Great Schism. Today, however, its size and color struck me as somehow abated.

But it wasn't his nose that brought James P. regularly to the office. It was his gout. Every six months without fail the big toe on his left foot imitated the aspect of

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his nose, with the added feature of excruciating pain.

These seizures occurred in spite of the medication which was supposed to allay them, primarily because James P., befogged a good deal of the time (even when sitting at the bank's presidential desk), often forgot to take his daily tablet of allopurinol. For a man who swallowed so much else from dawn to dusk, this omission seemed sinful.

Anyway, my semiannual procedure with James P. varied little.

"Good morning, James. Old gout got you again?"

"Good Godawmighty, Doc. Like Satan hisself got holt of that there toe with a pair of hot pliers."

Although James P. had spent two slothful years at a very expensive prep school and most of a year at the state university, he still talked like a good old boy and not deliberately either.

"You've been skipping your medication again."

"Damn, if I ain't. Keep misplacin' that little bitty bottle, Doc."

"Would it help if I told the druggist to use a large bottle next time, something about the size of a fifth?"

James P. chortled. "Now that ain't sech a bad idee at all, Doc."

"I'll give it further thought. Roll up your sleeve, James, and we'll see what your blood's doing today."

"And they call us bankers bloodsuckers. Hell fire, Doc, you taken more pints out a me than Seagram got in vat storage."

I don't have a nurse. In a small-town office like mine they're more hindrance than help. So except for keeping the books and mailing the monthly statements (which is handled by Miss Effie Gunn at her home), I do everything myself. Whenever I draw blood from James P. — and I usually take enough for several lab tests — the uric-acid content is invariably in the top ten milligrams.

I write him a new prescription. Give him a useless lecture. Refuse his invitation for a "quick one" at the Commerce Club. Forget him until the next time. This time, though, James P., rolling down his sleeve, introduced a new note.

"Take a gander at my face, Doc, and tell me what you see different."

"Different?" I never referred to his nose because I knew it was a subject of some mortification. "What do you mean *different*, James?"

"My ugly ol' nose."

"What about it?"

"Cain't you see it ain't half so ugly no more?"

"Now that you mention it."

"They's a good chance it might

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get near back to normal with a couple more treatments."

"Who's performing this minor miracle, James?"

"A little ol' gal name Hattie Hopkins."

"What are her credentials?"

"She ain't got none but know-how. Come to town some months back and bought the Conway property. My bank holds the paper."

"I see. You meet Miss Hopkins in the course of a business transaction; she looks at your nose and says she has a cure."

"Not a-tall like that, Doc.

"Don't nobody hardly ever mention my nose to my face. You know that, Doc. Most folks act like it ain't in place. Fix they eyes on anythin' — my tie or my fly — instead of watchin' my nose."

"Granted, James. Go on."

"The way it came up with Miz Hopkins, she join the Pine Hill Garden Club and prove, accordin' to the missis, that she got the greenest thumb in town. So they invite her to membership in the Thursday Afternoon Bridge Club, where she also do herself proud. Next thing, the Floral Baptist Sisterhood, they don't —"

"Quite a joiner, but get to the point."

I was actually anxious to glean every detail available about this Hopkins woman, but I didn't want James P. to know it.

"I'm gettin there in my own good time, Doc, so hold your horses. Well, seems the ladies just naturally cotton to Miz Hopkins because she so plumb filled with good cheer and talent. The missis says she can bake a cake'll make a snake's mouth water. Whup up a batch of peanut brittle while your back's turned. And she downright uncanny, the missis says, with them special fortune-tellin cards. Name slips my mind."

"Tarot?"

"Right. To hear the ladies tell it, Miz Hopkins can see anything with them cards — past, present or future."

"Feminine gullibility, James."

"I'da took the same tack a month ago, Doc. But after what happen to the missis, I figgered to have a second look."

"What happened to Sally Ann?"

"Wouldn't want this to get out, Doc."

"My Hippocratic oath on it."

"Tain't widely known — least-wise I hope not — that Sally Ann got a dark-brown wart on the inside of her right thigh. Hairy ol' thing. She never mention it to a soul because she always been ashame of it. A few weeks back, whilst visitin' with Miz Hopkins over a cup of tea and them cards, Sally Ann was real surprised when the cards come up

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with news of that there wart. Fact is, she begun to turn red as a beet from pure embarrassment. Then Miz Hopkins says, 'Sally Ann, they ain't no reason on earth why a body got to tolerate sech an unsightly defect in an otherwise smooth thigh,' she says, 'and if you so wish, I have a way to rid you of the pesky thing,' she says. And Sally Ann says, 'Then you go right ahead and do just that, Hattie,' she says. And you know what that little lady went and done, Doc?"

"She applied a leech to it."

James P.'s florid face registered astonishment. "How come you know that?"

"Keen eyes, keen ears, keen mind."

"I trust you ain't gone badger that lady with some sort a malpractice charge."

"What makes you say that, James?"

"Well, as county health officer you might think they was a case here. But take my word. Doc, she aint settin' up in business a-tall. She don't accept a red cent for her help. And, damn it, man, that wart's done gone for good, hair and all."

"So now, as it were, you've placed your nose in Miss Hopkins' fabulous hands."

"Damn right. Twice a week. Now be honest, Doc. Don't I look the better for it?"

"Indeed you do, James."

I finally came face to face with Miss Hopkins outside the A&P. She was accompanied by Mrs. Bayard Stoneman, a big-buttocked patient of mine, who performed the introduction.

"Dr. Devlin not only worries about us individually," gushed Mrs. Stoneman, "but en masse. Besides being our sympathetic physician, he's our county's faithful health officer."

Miss Hopkins appraised me with her bright green eyes in which I detected a glint of trepidation. "What I've seen of the town and the county so far, Doctor," she said in a small brave voice, "is all to the good."

"Thank you, ma'am. And where, may I ask, did you previously reside?"

"Oh, a pleasant-enough place over South Carolina way."

"I have friends in Aiken," I said.

"A charming community, Doctor. But I lived in Summerville."

"I have friends there too," I said.

A nearly palpable flutter of apprehension crossed her pale face.

"Oh, do you now," she said after a moment. "Well, I must confess my residence in Summerville was unhappily brief and I made few acquaintances."

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"The Castletons perhaps?" The name was sheer invention.

"I never met them personally."

"Or the Ridgewells?" Another invention.

"I recall seeing the names often in the society notes of the Summerville newspaper, Doctor."

"Aren't we fortunate," burst in Mrs. Stoneman, "that Miss Hopkins has come here to join our own little social circle?"

"Most fortunate," I said with a slight bow of departure.

Mrs. Stoneman suffers from chronic sciatica. Once a month, for the past five years, I've been tapping her gluteal arteries, superior and inferior, for 500 cc's of blood. She swears it affords her instant relief even though she can't sit down for several hours afterward.

I was convinced she'd be canceling her monthly appointments as long as Miss Hopkins was around.

The only acquaintance I have in Summerville is the health officer whose name herein shall remain inviolate.

I phoned him a few hours after the A&P meeting. I had reason to believe, I told him, that a person from his town had recently visited ours and left behind a communicable disease I preferred not to identify until more facts were at hand.

Would he check the municipal records for all the information pertaining to Miss or Mrs. Hattie Hopkins and get back to me at the earliest?

This worthy gentleman phoned collect the next morning and reported as follows:

If any Hattie, Harriet or Henrietta Hopkins — Miss, Ms. or Mrs. — had ever lived in Summerville, she managed it without leaving a trace. No record of birth, inoculation, marriage, divorce, taxes or death. No voting record. No record that she'd used a public utility — water, electric, gas, telephone. Not even an extant library card.

"You're damned thorough, Doctor," I said.

"My way of life, Doctor," he said.

Obviously our local phlebotomist, for profound reasons I was beginning to fathom, wished to keep secret her real origins.

Effie Gunn, my part-time bookkeeper, phoned in a week later to cancel her bi-monthly appointment. When I offered to fix another date, she demurred, explaining that henceforth she'd control her condition by diet.

Effie has long believed the fat forces of cholesterol are on the verge of dominating her capillaries, and she has insisted on a periodic count of their number. Hence, this

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volte-face was significant.

Effie was a member of the Thursday Afternoon Bridge Club. Knowing this, I regretfully concluded that she'd found in Miss Hopkins a more compatible ally in her war against cholesterol. But I knew something else. Effie would never submit to treatment by leech. She was deathly afraid of anything that crept on its belly. She once confided to me that she'd broken off an engagement with the only man she'd ever loved after watching him bait a hook with a nightcrawler.

From Effie's particular case I inevitably deduced that Miss Hopkins must be taking blood from the finicky element of her growing clientele with medical needle and syringe. And this called for affirmative action on my part.

Our weekly gazette faithfully reports the meetings of the Thursday Afternoon Bridge Club. So I chose that day to move against Miss Hopkins. The gazette said the ladies were convening this week, between the hours of two and four thirty, at the residence of Mrs. James P. Upson.

To play it safe, I rang Miss Hopkins' home a few minutes after two. No answer. Still playing it safe, I drove slowly past the Upson's stately home. Among the many cars parked in the sweep of the circular driveway, I quickly spotted the red super beetle I'd seen Miss Hopkins around town in. I then headed for the outskirts.

The late Judge Conway's house stands solitary amid five or six acres of flat wooded land in Hambleton Lane. The only other habitation along this quarter mile of narrow blacktop is that which makes it a cul-de-sac — the ramshackle Hambleton Mansion rotting away behind its termite-riddled Doric columns. Minnie Hambleton, at eighty the last of her line, still clings to life there, deaf as a post and half blind.

Miss Hopkins, I note as I pass, has definitely improved the late judge's property. The lawn that was a field of hay is lawn again. Rusty gutters and drainpipes are renewed. Where once was peeling paint there now is a sheen of gleaming white.

A short distance beyond the house I found a good-sized gap in the wild buckthorn and sourwood scrub that bordered most of the lane. I stopped the car and got out to see if the ground at this gap was firm enough to drive on. It seemed so.

Back in the car, I proceeded cautiously through the gap and on behind the tangled foliage until I was hidden from anyone who might move along the road. I sat in the car for a pensive minute. The absolute

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silence here was marred only by birdsong.

Finally I footed it back through the gap, darted across the road, took to a dry shallow ditch and hustled toward the edge of the Hopkins property. Reaching the one-car garage, whose up-sliding door was open on utter emptiness, I went around to the back of it.

This low-profile approach was probably not necessary. After all, how many cars would travel up or down Hambleton Lane in the course of a day? Damned few, if any. Yet I continued to be careful, advancing to the back of the house from tree to bush to trellis, because CAUTION was the inflexible watchword in view of what I was planning to do.

Miss Hopkins had refurbished the small rear porch to the extent of having an aluminum canopy placed over it. But she hadn't gotten to the latticework along the underside yet, and much of this was missing, and what remained was jaggedly broken.

Coming closer, I discerned something under there on the dank earth that called for further examination. It was an old nail keg.

Leaning forward, I grasped its damp sides and dragged it out into the open. It wasn't heavy. There was a sound of sloshing. The top was covered with fine-mesh wire screening secured by a heavy-duty staple at one side and hand-crimped the rest of the way around.

I lifted the screening, and there they were at the bottom of the keg in several inches of brackish water — a sluggish mass of leeches, their brown stripes overlapping each other in a series of linear sinuosities. At a guess, I'd say there were a hundred of them.

Crimping the cover back in place, I shoved the keg back under the porch and then mounted to the screen door. It was hooked shut, but, either in deference to the warm day or out of forgetfulness, the inner door was wide open. Like a veteran burglar, I slid a credit card between jamb and frame and lifted the hook from its eye.

The kitchen was spotlessly clean. I went to the refrigerator and opened it. And I found what I expected to find.

The tall, glass-stoppered flacon, half a liter in size, stood with appertinent intimacy between a bottle of milk and a carton of blueberry yogurt. It contents glowed through the chilled crystal with a color I call salmon pink. Yes, here was what is known euphemistically in arcane circles as a platelet cocktail.

What, one might ask, is a platelet cocktail?

Recipe:

Combine one part of homogenized milk with two parts of blood from *Homo sapiens,* add cracked

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ice and mix at high speed for thirty seconds in electric blender. Pour result into cold cocktail glass and garnish to taste with either nutmeg, cinnamon or a sprig of crushed mint.

Those esoteric few who are addicted to the platelet cocktail will avow it produces a euphoric high different from anything else on earth. And no hangover.

Why platelet?

It's the name of one of four human-blood components and was chosen for its pleasant sound.

On those rare occasions when I've discussed the platelet cocktail in an academic way, the listener invariably shudders and says, "ech!"

Most of us don't realize how deeply into the history of mankind the blood-drinking ritual goes. Savages often supped on the heart of a dead foe to absorb his courage. Biblical prophets, sacrificing a bullock on a desert altar, swallowed a handful of the spurting blood. The incubus of demonology reputedly suckled women in their sleep, drawing out blood with the milk. The African Watusi subsisted until recently on an exclusive diet of cow's milk and blood.

But to return to matters at hand, I removed the flacon from the refrigerator, took out the stopper and laced the cocktail with a yellow powder guaranteed to induce stupefying slumber. I then replaced the flacon precisely where I'd found it.

Next I began to search for the needles and syringes which were certain to be in the house. I found them almost immediately. Two syringes and six needles reposed in an autoclave on a shelf in the bathroom.

I was inordinately pleased that I hadn't misjudged Miss Hopkins. Her *modus operandi* was clear. She lured the credulous with her fortune-telling skill, enraptured them with her cakes, listened sympathetically to their plaint of ills, eventually offered to cure them with a bit of painless bloodletting — leeches at first for the hardy, needle and syringe for the queasy.

But the needle and syringe were her ultimate tools, for they gave her the wherewithal for the daily sundowners, the impeccable platelet cocktail.

During the five more minutes I spent in the house I discovered in a desk drawer, beside a pack of tarot cards, the spare key to the front door. Pocketing it, I went back to the kitchen and rehooked the screen door. I let myself out the front, hearing the lock click as the door closed.

It was 3:14 by the dashboard clock as I slid into the car seat. The Thursday Afternoon Bridge Club was good for more than another hour.

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Leaving Hambleton Lane, I allowed myself the luxury of a cigarette. Though I strongly warned my patients against smoking, I enjoyed a stolen taste of the weed myself.

"Don't you have no damn vices a-tall, Doc?" James P. Upson once asked when I'd advised him to lay off cigars.

"I have my minor frailties."

"How come you was never frail enough in the head to get married?"

"A frail will doesn't indicate a feeble mind, James."

That afternoon I made several ostentatious house calls. At 5:25 I headed back out to Hambleton Lane. The red super beetle was parked in front of the garage. I drove to my former place of concealment. With black medical bag in hand, I walked rapidly to the shining white house, observed only by a squirrel.

I assumed Miss Hopkins had already treated herself to a cocktail and now should be out like a light. Nonetheless, circumspection was demanded. Again I approached the house stealthily from the back of the garage. I looked through the bedroom window first. Nobody there. Bathroom same. Working my way quietly to the front of the house, I peered into the living room. There she was, sagging half off and half on the davenport.

With the spare key I unlocked the front door and entered. I set the medical bag down on a table in the living room and studied Miss Hopkins clinically for a few moments. She was dead to the world. I picked the empty cocktail glass from the rug and took it to the kitchen where I washed and dried it thoroughly and returned it to a cabinet shelf with similar glasses.

I carried Miss Hopkins, who weighed perhaps a hundred pounds, into the bathroom. Her snoring was soft, quite like a cat's purring. Sitting her on the toilet seat, I laboriously stripped her to the pelt, no mean task when the subject is limply uncooperative.

Next I laid her out face-up in the bathtub. A dreamy smile exposed her buck teeth.

I carried the clothing to her bedroom and folded it neatly across the back of a chair as I imagined she would have done if she were disrobing for a bath. In the closet I found a polkadot dressing gown, which I took back to the bathroom and hung on a hook behind the door.

Back in the living room I got from my medical bag a pair of rubber gloves — the heavy dishpan rather than the thin surgical kind. Then to the kitchen, where I dug up a large aluminum pot known as a steamer. Outdoors, I transferred to

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this pot with gloved hands every last leech in the keg under the porch.

Miss Hopkins was still possessed by narcosis as I set the pot on the bathroom floor.

I fetched my medical bag. Opening it wide, I got from it a special pipette with a one-pint bulb capacity, three quart-size plastic bottles and a lovely scalpel.

To facilitate the operation, I peeled the glove from my right hand and grasped the scalpel. Getting on my knees, I leaned in over the edge of the tub. At the interior bend of Miss Hopkins' right elbow I made a dainty but deep incision across the innominate artery. Reaching quickly for the pipette, I applied its beak to the incision.

When the bulb was full I expressed its contents into one of the plastic bottles, meanwhile pressing a finger hard against the incision to prevent the blood from spurting. I repeated this process until all three plastic bottles were full and Miss Hopkins was about three-quarters empty. Selecting three long leeches from the pot, I applied them to the incision. The others I scattered at random over the body. They began to dig in voraciously.

Half an hour later, entering my office, I was nearly overwhelmed by a dark wave of fatigue. In all my long life I had never done anything like this. I trusted I would never have to do such a thing again.

But the simple fact of the matter is that in a town as small as this, two of us was one too many.

I felt I could use a drink.

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WE WERE THE FIRST THAT EVER BURST - - -

It is well known that I do not take airplanes and that I hate to travel, and yet such is the pervasive mobility of human beings in our society that I have, on occasion, been thousands of kilometers from home. Since I'm writing a series of articles that deals essentially with the exploration of the Earth, I feel impelled to list the bounds of my personal wanderings thereupon.

The farthest east I have ever been is Moscow (37° E) and that happens to be the farthest north I have ever been, too (55° N.). That, however, was at the age of not-quite 3, when my parents were in the process of getting their tickets to come to the United States and were planning to take me with them.

That, of course, was an involuntary trip, and I remember nothing of it.

Where only voluntary trips are concerned, then the farthest east *and* north I have ever been is London (0.1°W. and 51°N.), in 1974.

If we consider my London visit as my farthest penetration northeast, then the farthest southeast I have ever been came in 1973 when I was on the ship *Canberra*, anchored off the city of Dakar in Senegal (17°W. and 14°N.).

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

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Directly southward, my farthest reach came in 1975, when I actually set foot on South America, at La Guaira, Venezuela (10°N.).

As for westward, my record penetration came in 1946 when I reached Honolulu, Hawaii (157°W.). That trip to Honolulu, however, came when I was in the army and, again, that was not voluntary. My farthest trip westward under my own steam was to Chicago (87°W.) which I reached for the first time in 1952.

As you see, despite all these daring trips of mine (from all of which I longed to return home) I have never crossed the Equator, nor, since I came to the United States, have I ever crossed the Prime Meridian. I have never seen any part of Asia or Australia, and, in particular, I have never been within 10,000 kilometers of Antarctica, which is the central subject of this article.

Last month, in discussing the southward penetration of humanity, I had reached the point where Columbus had successfully crossed the Atlantic Ocean and reached land, and where it had come to be realized that a second ocean separated that new land from east Asia (which had been Columbus's goal).

In 1493, in an agreement mediated by the Pope, Spain and Portugal had divided up the non-European portions of the Earth between themselves. Spain was to have everything west of a line running down the mid-Atlantic; Portugal everything east. Neither side thought to have the line run all the way around the globe. It ran from the North Pole to the South Pole on the Atlantic side only.

It turned out that on the Portuguese side of the line was the coveted Far East, while on the Spanish side of the line were only the primitive American continents. Spain chafed a lot over this.

In 1517, a Portuguese navigator, Ferdinand Magellan, having been basely mistreated (as he thought) by his government, defected to Spain. He suggested to the Spanish King that it was perfectly possible to stay west of the line of demarcation and still reach the Far East — if only one went far enough. All one had to do was to move around the Americas, either north or south, and then keep going. There was no line of demarcation on the other side to stop them.

On September 20, 1519, Magellan left Spain with five ships. He might have tried skirting the Americas to the north, but it was already known that if there were sea lanes on its northern boundary (the "Northwest Passage"), they were in Arctic waters that would be difficult to navigate.

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As to where the Americas might end in the south, no one as yet had any information, and the Southwest Passage might prove easy.

Magellan gambled on that. He led his ships down the eastern coast of South America, probing into every hopeful inlet, such as the ones where Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires are now located.

Farther south, Magellan and his men came across Indian natives who seemed, to them, to have big feet, and to this day the narrowing southernmost reach of South America is called "Patagonia," which is "big feet" in Spanish.

Finally, on October 21, 1520, when Magellan had gone far enough south to find the weather semi-Arctic (or, rather, semi-Antarctic), he found an inlet which seemed promising. He made his way through it under horribly stormy conditions — 50 kilometers of torture — and the passage is called "the Strait of Magellan" to this day.

When Magellan came out into the open ocean at last, and found it sunny and calm (at least at that moment), he looked out over the vast flat expanse and, with tears running down his cheek, named it the Pacific ("peaceful") Ocean. Of the European mariners, he was the first to ever burst into the Pacific Ocean.*

Magellan went on to push across the Pacific Ocean in a harrowing voyage during which he went 99 days without sight of land. Magellan himself was killed in the Philippine Islands, but he had reached the Far East as he said he would. The ships went on, picking up cargo and making their way through the Indian Ocean and around Africa, until after a three-year voyage, one ship only, with no more than eighteen men on board under the command of Juan Sebastian Del Cano, made it back to Spain. They were the first men to have circumnavigated the globe, and the spices they brought back far more than paid the expense of the voyage, if one does not count the loss of life.

From the standpoint of this article, however, what was most interesting about the voyage was that when Magellan and his men went through the Strait of Magellan, they penetrated farther south than any Europeans in history, reaching 54°S.

They did not, however, break the record in an absolute sense. South of the strait was land. The mariners sighted campfires on its shores and

**From their far southern position, the mariners observed two luminous patches in the heavens that looked like detached portions of the Milky Way and that could not be seen from Europe. They have been termed the "Magellanic Clouds" ever since, and they are two satellite galaxies of the Milky Way.*

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called it "Tierra del Fuego" ("Land of Fire"), a name it bears to this day. There were Indians on Tierra del Fuego who had penetrated farther south than Magellan's reach thousands of years before Magellan.

No one cared about Tierra del Fuego. There was clearly nothing to be gained from that frigid and dank region. It was just a place one passed by in taking the Southwest Passage to the glorious East. It was somehow assumed, on the basis of no evidence whatever, that it was the tip of another continent. Early maps showed this, with much imaginary coastal detail.

About fifty years after Magellan's voyage, the Spaniards were looting what is now called Latin America rather ruthlessly, and the English, who were in a cold war with Spain, were taking Spanish ships and raiding coastal towns whenever they could, in order to loot the looters. It was all unofficial, for Queen Elizabeth I professed herself horrified at the action of the English raiders (which frustrated the Spaniards no end, since she shared in the spoils and knighted the spoilers).

The most successful of the English looters was Francis Drake. It occurred to Drake that the Spaniards were well-fortified on the Atlantic coast of their American possessions, but utterly asleep on the Pacific coast, where they lived in fancied security.

Toward the end of 1577, therefore, Drake decided to take his ships through the Strait of Magellan and up the western shores of America. This he did, reaching as far north as what is now San Francisco Bay, and gathering so much loot that he stopped only because additional material would founder his vessel, the "Golden Hind."

He then headed across the Pacific and became the second mariner to circumnavigate the globe.

From the standpoint of this article, however, what was interesting about this voyage was that after Drake emerged from the Strait of Magellan, he found the Pacific to be not at all pacific. In fact, he was struck by a violent storm that drove him southward quite against his will. It drove him sufficiently far south for him to be able to demonstrate that Tierra del Fuego was an island and that south of it there lay open ocean. That stretch of open ocean has been called "Drake Passage" ever since.

Drake, in being driven as far south as 58°S., set a human all-time record for southward penetration. No one in all the history of the human species had ever been so far south.

If Tierra del Fuego hadn't seemed worth investigating, the possibility

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of still less inviting land south of Drake Passage certainly aroused no curiosity. The thrust of exploration lay in other directions — say in the location of additional land in the neighborhood of the Indonesian islands, which were fabulously wealthy in the raw materials that Europeans desired.

In 1602, a Spanish navigator, Luis Vaez de Torres, sailed south of the largest of the Indonesian islands, New Guinea, and the water passage there is now called "Torres Strait."

In that same year, the Dutch gained control of the Indonesian Islands, ousting the Portuguese. As vague reports came in of land south of Torres Strait, Anton Van Diemen, the governor-general of the islands took action. In 1643, he sent an exploring expedition southward under the Dutch explorer, Abel Janszoon Tasman.

Tasman had amazingly bad fortune. In the course of a 10-month voyage, he managed to sail all around an island as large as the United States, without sighting it or suspecting its existence. He did come across a small island to the southeast of the larger one, and called it "Van Diemen's Land" after his boss. It is now, more justly, known as "Tasmania," after the explorer. Tasman also located a pair of larger islands to the southeast of Tasmania, which he named after the Dutch province, Zeeland, and which are known as "New Zealand" now.

In a later voyage, Tasman spotted the northern shores of the large island he had missed and called it "New Holland." He had no suspicion that it was continental in size.

None of Tasman's discoveries were as far south as the southern tip of South America, so he set no records for southern penetration.

There remained a glittering prize to be found, though, and that was an imaginary land invented by the Greeks. Some Greeks, who knew the Earth was round and that all the land they knew was in the northern hemisphere, felt that by the principle of symmetry there ought to be an equal amount of land in the southern hemisphere. This land came to be called "Terra Australis" (Southern Land").

In 1700, the known land south of the Equator included the southern two-thirds of South America, the southern third of Africa, and assorted islands, of which the largest was New Guinea. All of this put together was considerably smaller in area than the northern land, so it seemed there must still be something missing.

Suspicion centered on the Pacific Ocean. The known shores of the

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Americas, of Asia and of the Indonesian Islands enclosed an area that made up half the surface of the Earth. Surely, it couldn't be empty of land.

European explorers criss-crossed the vast Pacific looking for Terra Australis, and some of them probed southward.

In 1738, a French naval officer, Pierre Bouvet de Lozier, sailed along the latitude of 55°S. for 1500 kilometers, but all he found was a small island about 2600 kilometers south of the southern tip of Africa. This island, now called "Bouvet Island," is not quite as far as the southern tip of South America so it did not set a record for southerly penetration.

Another French navigator, Yves Joseph de Kerguelen-Tremerec, set out in 1771 and found another island, larger than Bouvet Island, about 4000 kilometers southeast of the southern tip of Africa, and not quite as far south as Bouvet Island. The new island is now called "Kerguelen Island."

The greatest of all the Pacific explorers, however, was James Cook, who made so remarkable a name for himself as a ship's master that he is universally known as Captain Cook, and his first name is almost forgotten.

Between 1768 and 1771, on the first of three great voyages, Captain Cook sailed across the South Pacific Ocean and explored the coasts of New Guinea and New Zealand. He also investigated the bounds of Tasman's "New Holland" and showed it to be an island — but an island almost as large as all of Europe. He called it "Australia," a clear reminiscence of the legendary "Terra Australis."

Even with Australia subtracted, the Pacific Ocean seemed impossibly large, and in 1772, Captain Cook set off on a second expedition. He scoured the Pacific Ocean so thoroughly that it became quite plain that nothing of continental size could exist between Australia and South America. In fact, said Cook, rather mournfully, if any southern continent existed, it would have to be so far south that it would be worthless.

Of course, the Pacific Ocean isn't entirely empty. The land it contains is nearly 1,000,000 square kilometers in area or half again as large as Texas. The trouble is that it is split into some 10,000 tiny islands.

In his third and last voyage, from 1776 to 1779* he explored the northern Pacific and was finally killed (and eaten) by the inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands.

In the course of the second voyage, however, Cook finally surpassed

**During this voyage, the American privateers left him severely alone despite the fact that we were in rebellion against Great Britain. Cook's voyages were recognized as important enough to transcend national quarrels.*

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Drake's 200-year-old record southerly penetration.

On January 17, 1773, Captain Cook's ship reached a latitude of 66.5°S. and crossed the Antarctic Circle. It was the first time *any* human being had crossed the Antarctic Circle. He made two other crossings in the course of his journey, and his most southerly penetration took place on January 30, 1774*, when he reached 71.17°S. He was then only 1820 kilometers from the South Pole.

Captain Cook saw no continental land on any of his southern penetrations. His ship was always stopped by massed ice, and for all he could tell, it was ice all the way to the South Pole, with no land at all.

The Antarctic penetrations mentioned in this article must have been on the mind of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798, when he wrote "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." The Ancient Mariner leaves England, and his ship is driven southward through the South Atlantic (as the storm had driven Drake) until, like Cook, he reached the southern ice:

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound.

Under the guidance of an albatross, the explorers find their way out of the ice northward again and into the Pacific Ocean on the other side of South America — and here there is a reminiscence of Magellan's great penetration:

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

Captain Cook did discover some southern islands, though. He discovered "South Georgia Island" (named for George III), which is just about as far south as Tierra del Fuego, but 1750 kilometers to the east. He also discovered the South Sandwich Islands, which he named for John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich, and First Lord of the Admiralty.†

The "South Sandwich Islands" lie to the southeast of South Georgia. They are in a north-south line and represent the first pieces of land ever

Please remember that January and February are the height of the Antarctic summer.

†*The "sandwich" we eat is also named for him, as are the "Sandwich Islands" the name Cook gave to what we now call the "Hawaiian Islands."*

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discovered lying south of Tierra del Fuego. The southernmost of the South Sandwich Islands, appropriately called Cook Island, is at 59.3°S.

One consequence of Captain Cook's explorations was that the Antarctic waters were shown to be rich in seals and whales. Ships known as "sealers" and "whalers" went south to prey on those mammals, and new discoveries were made in consequence.

In October 1819, a British seaman, William Smith, discovered the "South Shetland Islands." These are directly south of Tierra del Fuego and set a new southerly record for land. The southernmost of the group, appropriately called Smith Island, is at 63.0°S.

Then the British monopoly on Antarctic exploration was broken. In 1819, a Russian explorer, Fabian Gottlieb Bellingshausen, was sent southward by Tsar Alexander I with specific instructions to better Cook's record southern penetration.

Bellingshausen didn't, but he did come across a small island, about the size and shape of Manhattan, which he named "Peter I Island" after Tsar Peter the Great. That island is at 68.8°S., or 240 kilometers *south* of the Antarctic Circle. It was the first piece of truly Antarctic land ever discovered.

Bellingshausen went on to discover a larger island about 600 kilometers farther west, and this he named for Tsar Alexander. Bellingshausen thought it might be part of a continental mass, but it wasn't; it's just so wedged in with ice that its island nature is hard to demonstrate. The most southerly portion of "Alexander Island" is at 72.5°S.

The portion of the ocean between Peter I Island and Alexander Island is known as "Bellingshausen Sea."

Meanwhile, a British naval commander; Edward Bransfield, charted the South Shetland Islands and explored the waters to the south, a region still called "Bransfield Strait" in his honor. Bransfield also reported on January 30, 1820, a rather dubious sighting of land to the south of the Strait and called it "Graham Land" after the then-First Lord of the Admiralty, James R. G. Graham.

On November 16, 1820, a 21-year-old American sailor, Nathaniel Brown Palmer, in command of a small sloop that was part of a larger fleet, *definitely* sighted land south of Bransfield Strait.

The result was a stubborn long-lived geographical dispute between Great Britain and the United States. The British called the new land "Graham Land" and the Americans called it "Palmer Land." There was

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no reason to think that the new land, whatever its name, was anything but another island, but in the end it turned out to be part of the Antarctic continental land-mass. The most northerly part is a gently-curving S-shaped piece of land about 1500 kilometers long, with its extreme point at 63°S., or 480 kilometers north of the Antarctic Circle and into the South Temperate Zone.

It was not till 1964 that the naming conflict was settled. It was then decided to call the northern part of the narrow finger of land "Graham Land," the southern part "Palmer Land" and to call the whole by the neutral name of "Antarctic Peninsula."

On February 7, 1821, an American sealer, John Davis, actually disembarked on the Antarctic Peninsula and therefore became the first human being to stand on Antarctica. His feat, however, went completely unknown, for it was not till 1955 that the log of his ship was discovered, and his priority understood. (Davis, perhaps influenced by Bellingshausen, stated in his log his opinion that he was standing on an Antarctic continent, but he had no evidence for it; only intuition.)

Cook's mark was finally broken on February 20, 1823, when an English whaler, James Weddell, reached a mark of 72.25°S. in an oceanic inlet now called "Weddell Sea." At the point where wind and ice turned him back he was within 1800 kilometers of the South Pole.

Weddell suspected that the sea penetrated all the way to the South Pole and that only ice, not land, blocked the passage. If that were so, it would be likely that there was no Antarctic continent, but only, at best, a collection of Antarctic islands.

Weddell Sea lies just to the east of Antarctic Peninsula. In January, 1841, the Scottish explorer, James Clark Ross, entered another oceanic inlet, some 2000 kilometers west of Weddell Sea. The new inlet is "Ross Sea."

Ross sailed south until he found himself stopped by a towering wall of ice, 60 to 100 meters high (that is, as high as a building of 20 to 30 stories). We know this now to be an enormous shelf of ice pushed off the land beyond onto the sea. It is called the "Ross Ice Shelf" and it covers an area about the size of France.

Ross sailed along the limits of the ice shelf that year and again the following year and eventually achieved a new southern mark of 78.15°S., which is 1150 kilometers from the South Pole.

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One of his more interesting discoveries in his exploration of Ross Sea was Mount Erebus, an active volcano 3.7 kilometers high. It is on an island (Ross Island) and is at 77.4°S., the southernmost active volcano in the world. The picture of its red hot lava surrounded by eternal ice, may have given Edgar Allan Poe the idea for an elaborate simile in his poem, "Ulalume" written in 1847:

These were days when my heart was volcanic
As the scoriac rivers that roll —
As the lavas that restlessly roll
Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek
In the ultimate climes of the pole —
That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek
In the realms of the boreal pole. *

The Weddell Sea is also covered by an ice shelf in its southern reaches, one that is called the Filchner Ice Shelf, after the German explorer, Wilhelm Filchner.

If the two ice shelves were imagined as disappearing, the southernmost shore of the Weddell Sea would be at about 82°S. (900 kilometers from the South Pole) and the southernmost shore of the Ross Sea would be at about 86°S. (500 kilometers from the South Pole).

As long as the ice shelves are there, however, an ultimate limit is set to southerly penetration by ship. Ross's mark is the best that can be done by any ship. To do better, explorers would have to take to their legs.

The Antarctic discoveries I have described so far were in that part of the region south of South America and the Pacific, where the sea bit deep. Not so on the other side of the Antarctic south of Australia, Africa, and the Indian Ocean that lies between.

In 1831, the first sighting of Antarctic land south of Africa was made by an English navigator, John Bisco. He called it "Enderby Land" after the owners of his vessel. He saw the land only from a distance, though. Ice prevented him from actually reaching it.

In 1840, a French explorer, Jules Dumont D'Urville, spied a shoreline near the Antarctic Circle south of Australia and called it Adélie Land, after his wife.

**Poe cheats, of course, by inventing the name "Yaanek" in order to get a rhyme for "volcanic" (and "titanic"). What's more, he transfers the volcano to the North Polar regions so he can use the adjective boreal." The corresponding adjective for the South Polar regions would be "austral" and that would stick Poe with a missing syllable.*

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Between 1838 and 1842, the American naval officer, Charles Wilkes, headed an exploring expedition that eventually took him to the Antarctic. There he followed a long stretch of coastline between Enderby Land and Adélie Land, a coastline that followed the curve of the Antarctic Circle with surprising exactness. This stretch of coast, lying south of the Indian Ocean, is now known as Wilkes Land.

Wilkes, on returning, was the first to proclaim that all the isolated discoveries of the previous quarter-century could be fitted together to indicate the existence of a South Polar land mass of continental size. Wilkes then was the effective discoverer of Antarctica as a continent.

As it happens, I think that all national and ethnic chauvinisms are unlovely, but every once in a while, I can't resist —

Although the United States was still in its raw youth in the first half of the 19th Century, it was an American, Palmer, who made the first definite sighting of any part of Antarctica. It was an American, Davis, who first set foot on any part of the Antarctica. It was an American, Wilkes, who first established Antarctica as a continent and was its effective discoverer.

We were the first to ever burst into that frozen land.

EPITAPH TO A TIME TRAVELER

Shoot his own grandpa?
"No way," vowed Ed Grimm.
But when he kissed grandma
His grandpa shot *him*.

—*Sherwood Springer*

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Jack Haldeman, brother of sf writer Joe, is 36 and lives on the Gulf Coast of Florida with his wife and daughters. He has worked as a research biologist, medical technologist, photographer and is currently writing full time, with more than 30 sales to sf magazines and anthologies. His first novel, VECTOR ANALYSIS, is being published shortly by Berkley.

Mortimer Snodgrass Turtle

by JACK C. HALDEMAN

It was a beautiful, cool morning in the forest. Drops of dew hung to the undersides of the broad fern leaves like small suspended diamonds. On the musty forest floor animals were beginning to stir. It was the dawn of another day in the life of the turtles.

Steadily, slowly, the turtles started their daily forage for food. Heads forward, necks straining, feet outstretched, they padded along the moss-covered ground, looking for berries and other fine tidbits. Such was the fate of all turtles, the daily search for food.

But was that all there was to life? It would appear so, for all the turtles seemed content with their lot. All, that is, except one — Mortimer Snodgrass Turtle, known far and wide for his strange behavior and weird ideas. In short, Mortimer was a troublemaker and a pain in the shell to his elders.

After all, hadn't it been Mortimer who suggested that they forage at night when it was cooler and there weren't so many big animals around? A lot of good that suggestion did. Somebody forgot to tell Mortimer that turtles don't see too well in the dark, and he had walked right over the edge of the river and floated so far downstream that it took him three weeks to walk back. No doubt about it, Mortimer was trouble.

"Hey, Mort," said Fred, one of Mortimer's hatchlings. "Get a move on. Time to forage for food."

"Not interested."

"What do you mean? What else is there besides eating and sleeping?

"There are higher things that a turtle can aspire to," replied Mortimer, stifling a yawn. Truth is, he was tired and really didn't feel like foraging.

"What higher things can a turtle do? I guess it's possible to be

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made into soup or stuffed and used as a paperweight, but somehow that doesn't appeal to me."

"I'm going to think of something," replied Mortimer.

"Thinking doesn't fill your stomach, foraging does. See you around."

Mortimer nodded and settled back to do some serious thinking about the higher purposes of being a turtle.

It was a difficult job. The life of an average turtle was a quiet one, not easily given to activities of the sort usually referred to as "higher purposes." They were hatched, grew up through a lifetime of sleeping and foraging, and perhaps produced a new generation of turtles before they died. Not a very noteworthy existence — perhaps suitable for his hatchlings, but not nearly enough for the adventurous Mortimer.

If only he had been born a sea turtle. Ah, for the freedom of the sea, the limitless expanse of streams and oceans. Swimming, that was something a turtle could really excel in. However, the brief encounter with water the time he fell into the stream had convinced him that he was not cut out for the aquatic life. So swimming was out, and the only comparable activity for a land turtle was walking, and everybody did that about the same.

Maybe that was the idea. If everyone walked the same, he would do it differently, yes, better! Best! The only outstanding characteristic of a turtle's walk was that it was slow. That was it! He would be the slowest walking turtle around. He would go slower than any turtle had dared go before!

As quickly as the thought came to Mortimer, he realized that this was no mere trick he could perform without training his body to perfection. For the next few weeks he ate heavily to build his strength and practiced walking slowly. Often on his training walks he would be passed by his fellow hatchlings.

"What are you doing, Mort?" they would ask.

"I'm going to be the slowest turtle in the world," he would reply.

"You're getting there," they would say, passing him by in search of berries.

And so he was, for with each succeeding day he would grow slower and slower. Ah, this was a turtle's highest purpose. Often his elders would walk past.

"What are you doing, crazy Mortimer?" they would ask.

"I'm going to be the slowest turtle in the world," he would reply.

"You're getting there," they would say, shaking their heads.

Soon he was ready for the big day. He would show them that a turtle was not limited to the artificial bounds imposed upon him. It

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was possible to go past the turtle's world into the dizzy realm of the snails — and, yes, even beyond; perhaps even to the world of a rock or a piece of moss. There were no limits to how slow he could go.

In spite of warnings from their elders, many of Mortimer's hatchlings were gathered the morning he attempted his feat. They held back, half hiding in the ferns, waiting for him to start. They waited and waited. Several grew bored and left before they realized he had actually started. He was moving so slow they had thought he was asleep.

Every muscle straining, he lifted his right front leg ever so slowly. A snail paused to watch him and then went on, leaving Mortimer in a cloud of dust.

The rest of the hatchlings milled around for a while, eating ferns and making rude comments. After a while, they all left. It was the most boring thing they had ever seen.

Let them leave, it didn't bother Mortimer. If they failed to understand his mission, it was their fault, not his. He grew dizzy and drifted off into visions of slowness. In his dreams, a giant turtle came to him and told him he would die and be reborn even slower than before. He wept at the vision. Slowly.

For six days he remained in approximately the same spot. Fellow hatchlings occasionally came by to see if he had moved, but soon they quit coming, and on the seventh day a deranged armadillo came along and ate him.

He was reborn as a rock. Some folks never learn.

Coming soon

Next month: "The Syndicated Time," a new novelet by Sterling E. Lanier (of Commander Ffellowes fame). This is not a Ffellowes story, but an actionful tale about what happens when the Mafia gets its hands on a time machine. The July issue is on sale May 30.

Soon: new stories by Stephen King, Michael Bishop, C. J. Cherryh, Robert Aickman, Avram Davidson, Joseph Green, L. Sprague de Camp, Terry Carr and many others. Send us the coupon on page 158, and F&SF will be delivered to your door every month.

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'Stand and deliver!' Now I ask you: how can an Air Police sergeant

In this new Crispin Mobey story, the country is hit by a wave of senile delinquency, as elderly citizens turn from shuffleboard to robbery, rape, hijacking and worse. Mobey is sent on a fact-finding mission . . .

Let Us Prey

by GARY JENNINGS

SUN CITY, ARIZONA (UPI) — The 3,000 enlisted men of Luke Air Force Base near here are grumbling mutinously because today is a payless payday. Their entire month's wages — some sixteen million dollars in cash — were hijacked yesterday in this ordinarily serene senior citizens' retirement community.

The robbery occurred when a USAF armored van carrying the payroll from a Phoenix bank to the airbase stopped for a moment as it passed the Sunland Memorial Park Garden of Prayer here, to let a feeble little old lady in a wheeled aluminum walker negotiate a ramped pedestrian street crossing.

"While she was inching past our truck," the driver told police, "an old man tapped on my window with a corncob pipe and asked for a light. When I politely opened the triple-locked door, me and my partner were surrounded by this bunch of old geezers who wheezed, 'Stand and deliver!" Now I ask you: how can an Air Police sergeant draw a gun on a pack of bandits old enough to be his grandfathers?"

Questioned by Sun City police and Air Force CID agents, the guards could describe the hijackers only sketchily: "They all wore identical jogging suits, and their faces were masked with Avon Essence-of-Cucumber Wrinkle Remover Cream . . ."

ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA (AP) — The white-haired and wizened rapist who preys on the few young and beautiful females in this predominantly elderly community last night claimed his third victim in three years, this time a pretty coed of South Florida University.

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The sex fiend's modus operandi was the same as in the two previous incidents, of which he has repeatedly and brazenly boasted to local newspapers, sending obscene letters signed with an obvious alias, "The L-Dopa Lecher."

He limped up to the girl as she hurried home from a late class through a dark area of the Bay Campus. He quaveringly asked her the time, and when she raised her book-laden hands to consult her wristwatch, he instantly bound her wrists together with the rubber arm-cuff of a sphygmomanometer (an instrument more properly used to measure blood pressure).

Before the girl could call for help, he clapped an adhesive Dr. Scholl's bunion pad across her mouth. Then, as in the previous assaults, he dragged the girl into bushes nearby and bound her more securely with a swathing of Ace bandages. This, police theorize, enables him to rest and catch his breath after his exertions, until he recovers strength to proceed with the molestation.

The victim was able to provide one possible new clue to the identity of the L-Dopa Lecher. She told St. Petersburg police that, after laboriously completing the attack and before he limped off into the night, her assailant cackled to himself, "I may not be as good as I once was, hee hee hee, but I'm still as good *once* as I ever was . . ."

LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA (UPI) — This heretofore almost crime-free town, populated mainly by respectable retirees and pensioners, was shocked today when the Cub Scout son of a retired stockbroker reported to La Jolla police that he was robbed last night of "an investment that took all my life savings."

The youngster (name withheld because of his tender age) said he was riding his mo-ped to a 3:00 a.m. rendezvous with some fellow Cub Scouts when he was overtaken by about a dozen motorized wheelchairs. Forcing him to a halt at the curb, the chairs' occupants snatched his schoolbook satchel from the mo-ped's luggage rack.

"They didn't get any moola," said the young victim, "because I'd shelled out every buck I had for the package of pot I'd just brought up from Tijuana to peddle to my buddies. Don't ask me what a lot of old (expletives deleted) would want with a poor kid's first and only score of Acapulco Gold which I'd saved up all my hubcap and CB money to buy it. But they heisted the goods and went whizzing off in their electric wheelchairs."

While the boy waited at the police station for his parents' chauffeur to come for him, a reporter asked him if he could describe the heisters. The tearful

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little victim could only shrug and murmur, "They were old. Men, women, I dunno. Like I mean, man, who can tell one old (expletive deleted) from another?"

A police spokesman, who estimated the street value of the stolen marijuana at more than $50,000, said, "La Jolla may look tolerantly on kiddy pranks like pot-pushing. But, at the scene of the crime, we also found nitroglycerin pills, amyl nitrite ampules and empty insulin syringes, carelessly dropped by the ciminals. This may presage a new and viciously indiscriminate kind of dope traffickers . . ."

Department of Dynamic Maturity
Southern Primitive Protestant Church
World Headquarters
Abysmuth, Mississippi, U.S.A.

Dear Department:

To begin at the beginning . . . I was summoned to World Headquarters to confer with your department's Advisor on Aging Gracefully, the venerable Reverend Peter Gleet, on a Friday evening in April.

When his secretary announced me — "The Reverend Crispin Mobey of the Missionary Division" — and I tottered breathless and flustered into his office, I did not at once blurt out my excuse for being both late and untidy in appearance. But then Rev. Gleet handed me that sheaf of newspaper clippings and after I'd read them, I had to tell him:

"Sir, I was mugged on my way to our appointment tonight. An old lady bashed me in the back of my head with her crutch. Then, holding me helpless at the point of a steel knitting needle, she rifled my pockets. I was carrying only bus fare, but she took even that mite, and I had to run all the way to headquarters here."

He solemnly shook his hoary head and sighed, "I am beginning to feel ashamed of being a senior citizen myself. This crime wave of senile delinquency is sweeping from coast to coast, wherever there is a concentration of elderly, from inner-city slums to the most exclusive and determinedly vivacious Swinging Sunsets estates."

I solemnly shook my still-aching head and asked, "Does this somehow involve our dear Southern Primitive Protestant Church?"

"SoPrim has always been ready and eager to meddle — er, to concern itself with any urgent social issue. And, as in any Fundamentalist sect, practically all of our members *are* elderly." I coughed, and he tactfully amended that: "Well, in their sclerosed intellects, if not in their sum of birthdays." I smiled, appeased, and he continued: "We have no evidence that any SoPrim Protestants have yet

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participated in any of these atrocities. However, we must take measures to avert their involvement as this madness spreads."

"You expect it to spread, sir? Might it not be just another geriatric fad, like those copper bracelets to ward off arthritis?"

"It shows no sign of abating." The Reverend Advisor sighed again and leafed through his file of clippings. "Here is another item. The Lake Havasu City shopping plaza was plagued by a continuing pilferage of hot-water bottles, trusses and Kellogg's All-Bran. When the police finally tracked the shoplifter to a seedy local trailer court — the Modern Maturity Mobile Mansions — all the inhabitants drew up their Winnebagos and Airstreams into a frontier-style circle. For three days, they held the police force at bay with a gas bombardment."

"Gas?" I inquired. "The butane from their trailer tanks?"

"No, they all stoked up their bedside steam inhalers, aimed the nozzles at the police and let fly with the fumes of Vicks VapoRub. They also set fire to their mustard plasters and Preparation-H suppositories and fanned that smoke of acrid mustard and poisonous mercury at the beseigers. The police couldn't breach the barrage until they got gas masks from the National Guard. Now all the oldsters are in custody and enduring interrogation, but —"

"Don't tell me the police are subjecting those old folks to the Third Degree!"

"Not exactly. The officers simply confiscated the old folks's bottles of Hadacol and Geritol so they'd suffer alcohol-withdrawl pangs. But that still hasn't compelled any of them to crack and name the shoplifter among them." Rev. Gleet shook his snowy locks again.

"To what, sir, do you attribute this sudden rebellion of the ancients?"

"There are two prime causes, Mobey. One is the increase in leisure time, owing to automation's doing more and more of the world's work. The other is mankind's increasing longevity, owing to modern medical miracles."

"Excuse me," I ventured, "but those hardly sound pernicious."

"Son, the Devil finds work for idle hands. A while back, when *juvenile* delinquency became a scourge, it was blamed on the lack of gainful employment for the young. The poor kids, or so said the psychologists, had nothing to occupy them but mischief. Well, by the same token, aren't most *old* people unemployed? Oh, they may be legitimately retired, and they may enjoy subsistence pensions or doles of some kind. But their stipends are fixed, while the cost of

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living keeps rising. So, if they've got the pep for it, why shouldn't they, like the young, turn to crime to augment their income?"

"But these," I said, riffling through the news items, "aren't all profit-motivated crimes."

"Nor are all crimes in general. Some are done, as the jargon has it, purely for kicks. SoPrim policy forbids me to preach any such heresy, but I personally would prefer playing Dillinger to playing shuffleboard for the rest of my days. The so-called three B's of retirement are — if you'll pardon the vulgarity — Boredom, Bitchiness and Booze. Apparently many oldsters are now substituting the fourth B of Banditry simply to enliven their lackluster existence."

"Or," I muttered, "L for Lechery."

"Yes," said Rev. Gleet. "There you see the pernicious influence of all these new magazines aimed at the aged — though they would never print a foul four letter word like 'aged.' They unceasingly drum into their readers that sexual fun and games can continue unabated unto the brink of the grave. Any day now, I expect to be called to give pastoral comfort to some SoPrim elder on his deathbed and find it is an undulating waterbed with a mirror canopy."

"Oh, come, sir," I chuckled. "A magazine may increase its circulation by flattering or even deceiving its rickety readers, but it certainly can't increase their —"

"Ah, but there has been another medical miracle. Science concocted the drug L-3, 4-dihydroxyphenylanine as a palliative for certain geriatric ailments. The drug is better known as L-Dopa, and it turned out to have a spectacular side effect. It gave every elderly patient a new and even rampant sex drive. Its prescription is now most carefully controlled — where it can be. But you can imagine that every retirement community now has its resident L-Dopa pusher, hence a high proportion of prancing old goats and simpering old cows. You can also imagine that the old goats and cows don't chase each other. They go rutting after nymphets and faunlets."

I blushed, but forebore to tell him what that old mugger lady had attempted while her scrawny claw groped in my trousers pocket. Instead I remarked, "But these—what shall we call them? — these rebels post-menopause — surely they are few and feeble compared to our forces of law and order."

"You are wrong. America has for so long worshiped the cult of youthfulness that it overlooks the grim statistics. Old people live to get even older these days. Meanwhile, America's birthrate has declined over the past decade or more.

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Just because young people tend to be offensively obtrusive, we think we live in a country of the young. Not so. At this moment, Reverend Mobey, approximately *one of every eight Americans is over the age of sixty-five.* Thus the United States has a population of some 28 million senior citizens — more than the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, militia, secret services and all the police forces of every state, city, town and village combined!"

"Merciful Heavens," I murmured.

"The danger is plain. So far, the old people's depredations have been scattered and whimsical. But eventually they will recognize their potential for nationwide organized crime. Among them are retired military men, deposed politicians (Nixon is nearly seventy), rich financiers, even nuclear scientists. When they decide — I do not say if — *when* they decide to mobilize, they can pool their resources of talent and experience. They can pool their riches and savings, their pensions and insurance annuities, their newly ill-gotten loot. They can afford to buy or make every kind of weapon from zip-guns to nuclear devices. They can arm themselves more formidably than any underground terrorist group, or even the mighty Mafia. At a signal, all the feisty ancients can rise up in concert, to mount an irresistible assault on the bastions of our society. The forces of law and order will be hopelessly outnumbered."

"But not the forces of Faith!" I cried. "If the Lord be with us, who can stand against us? I assume So-Prim has a plan, sir. Where do I come in?"

"The plan is, first, for me to make a fact-finding tour of a specially selected senior citizens' retirement community. You have been assigned to accompany me as my interpreter."

"To interpret?" I said, confused. "I don't speak Old, sir."

"You speak Spanish, do you not? I know you spent some time in Oblivia."

"Well, yes, sir, I reckon my Spanish is passable. But" — I gulped — "You must also know that Crispin Mobey is persona non grata in Oblivia. I can't ever go —"

"We are going to Mexico. Many elderly Americans retire there, both for the clement climate and the lower cost of living. And there have been no reported cases of old-codger crime among the American retirees in Mexico. I am to find out why not. If I can learn anything which may be applicable here, I shall return and use that knowledge, God willing, to help stop this Stateside surge of senile delinquency. Your being able to speak Spanish to the natives should make my trip easier. So go now, my boy,

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and pack. And pray."

Except that it is unthinkable that I ever could or would retire from my chosen lifework, I believe I too would gladly retire to San Miguel de Atayde. It is a quaint and lovely mountain town, of tenderly preserved Spanish Colonial architecture, cobbled streets, perpetual springtime, crystalline air, hummingbirds, butterflies and flowers, everywhere.

Once I had got Rev. Gleet and myself from the Mexico City airport, onto a bus for Atayde, and there booked us into adjoining rooms in the Hotel Feliz, I found little use for my fund of Spanish. Excluding the native Mexicans, Atayde is almost entirely populated by male and female retirees (*jubilados* in Spanish, though that word is not pronounced like "jubilation," nor is it anywise synonymous). They are mostly American, a few Canadian, and almost none of them, though many have lived in Atayde for years, yet speak anything but English.

The majority of them congregate each morning, and spend the remainder of every day, sunning their old bones under the topiary laurels of the town's central plaza, on a long row of park benches facing the rose-and-amber stone Parroquia, biggest of Atayde's countless Roman Catholic churches. That line of benches has been known as Castanet Row ever since an irreverent wag commented that, if all its inert benchwarmers were to take out their teeth, they could perform the world's greatest castanet concert.

Rev. Gleet ("Call me Pete") easily insinuated himself into the ranks of the day-long sitters, while I — not being white-haired, gray-haired, blue-haired or bald — sort of lurked unobtrusively in the background. The others, who had long been boring each other with their reiterated life stories, were only too pleased to have "Pete's" newcomer ear to bend.

I suppose they comprise an assortment typical of any retirement community anywhere. There was Brig. Gen. Volpone (Ret.), who adamantly insisted on being addressed always by his full title of rank — and who was currently on the verge of apoplexy because the local telephone directory, prone to typographical error, now flaunted the listing "Frig. Gen. Volpone." There was the inevitable old biddy obsessed with occultism, Patty O'Manny, forever blathering about her "psychic awareness" of other people's "psychic auras" and predicting dire things therefrom. There were the wilted ex-warriors of the Atayde American Legion post, each of whom (I was told) had fought his Great War in some such capacity as clerk-typist at some

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such place as Fort Sill, Okla. These spent less time basking on Castenet Row than boozing in the Cucaracha catina, whence they kept sending to the White House blearily bellicose manifestoes denouncing "the Panama Canal giveaway" and other U.S. foreign-policy follies.

There were several retirees who, to avert petrifaction, had devised make-work for themselves. A retired interior decorator offered classes in rug weaving and had somehow acquired a nickname which no one ever explained to me: "Fruit-of-the-Loom." An elderly black gentleman was engaged in teaching the plaza urchins a brand of English which (should they ever emigrate to Mississippi) would get them thrown out of every white-only restaurant. Others of the oldsters were writing their memoirs. One retired physician brought his portable typewriter to Castanet Row every day, to peck at what he described as "a witty, wise and winsome" account of his long career as a simple country proctologist: *All Things Prone and Puckered.*

Pete Gleet was of course, as a newcomer, deluged with questions and advice pertinent to every subject of compelling interest to retirees. Had he made all the proper consular arrangements for postal delivery of his Social Security checks? Had he yet discovered the one dentist in Atayde who really understood denture fitting? Did he think the IRS would carry out its threat to cancel expatriates' tax benefits? Had he yet visited the nearby spa where he could macerate his stiff old joints in the hot mineral waters? Had he yet been treated by the resident and retired but still (illegally) practicing chiropractor? How would he bid such-and-such a bridge hand if north, east and south had already bid such-and-such . . .? However, after about a week of this, Rev. Gleet began adroitly to steer the conversations to the subject of crime in the community.

"Crime?" exclaimed Castanet Row in chorus. Of course there was crime! What else could you expect from "a bunch of barbaric Meskin foreigners"? Why, from the very moment an American started building his or her grandiose Miami Moorish house in the exclusive colony which the Meskins disparagingly called Disneylandia, the poor, helpless, despised retiree could expect to be gulled and price-gouged by every Meskin contractor, carpenter, plumber, etc.

Once he was in residence, the retiree would be regularly burglarized of the contraband sciatica-diathermy machines, gland-rejuvenation orgone boxes, portable saunas, gland-rejuvenation hyperbaric oxygen cabinets, color TVs and other such indispensables he had gone to

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such trouble to smuggle untaxed across the border. When an employer's lazy Meskin maidservants weren't malingering — taking a maternity furlough every nine months — they'd be plundering his or her medicine chest, dosing themselves with all the gringo Serutan, henna, Pepto-Bismol, peroxide, Premarin, Man-Tan, etc., evidently in the hope of finding something that would prove an abortifacient. Also, the retirees regularly lost their trifocals, hearing aids, corsets, colostomy bags and pacemaker battery-packs to the Meskin pickpockets who infested every street fiesta. Also, they were outrageously overcharged for the imported Cutty Sark and Jim Beam they preferred to the native rums and tequilas. *Crime?* You better believe it!

"So far as I can determine," said Rev. Gleet in a discouraged voice, as we conferred over dinner in the Hotel Feliz, "except for some alimony widows and insurance widows who cohabit indiscriminately with the local taxi drivers and busboys, there is indeed no evidence of crime or sin among the elderly Americans here. But the reason seems self-explanatory: enough crime is already being committed by the local petty hoods you'd find anywhere. I was seeking some secret known only to these expatriate senior citizens, some tranquilizer I could take back Stateside to alleviate the situation there. All I can think of is to take with me a horde of wetback thieves and burglars. But that would start the Mafia lobbying in Washington — like the trades unions — to demand the ouster of immigrant competition."

"I am only supernumerary on this mission," I said humbly, "but I might point out, sir, that you've heard just one side of the story. I looked up 'colostomy bag' in a medical dictionary, and I seriously doubt that even the most depraved and desperate Mexican pickpocket would want one. Why not let me make some discreet inquiries among the accused?"

So that's what I did. At first, the Mexicans I approached were openly leery of me simply because I was a gringo. But at least I was a gringo who spoke some Spanish, and slowly, coaxingly, eventually I persuaded them that I was not a spy for the other gringos. Timidly, tentatively, then absolutely gushing with relief at finding me a sympathetic listener, they told me some appalling tales.

A housemaid: "Sí, señor, though I have no husband, every October for seven years I have begged time off from my work to have a baby. Do you know why? Because every January my *patrona* spends a week at that Rio Caliente fat place

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in Guanajuato to shed the bulges she acquires during the Christmas and New Year festivities. While she is gone, my *patron*" — she hung her pretty head — "takes me to wife instead. Can I resist or refuse? Can I complain? I should lose my position, and without a *caracter* to get another. And I now have seven little mouths to feed."

A gardener: "Sí, señor, I saw the *ladrón* come over the wall in the night and enter my master's house through a window. And I saw him depart, bearing in his arms the magic box in which my old master sits for hours that it might restore his shriveled *cojones.* But the thief was no Zorro. He did not leap the wall. He used a ladder, and even that with much trembling. It was all he could do to carry the magic box. And he was no Mexican. He was a gringo señor from next door, even older than my master. But can I tell that to the *policía?* The rich gringo would accuse *me,* and whose word would be believed?"

A taxi driver: "Si, señor, this elderly female painted to look young, she staggers out of El Discoteco and hails my cab. We drive to her house in Disneylandia. She is too tipsy to manage her key, so I assist her inside. There she says, 'Attack me, or I will scream that you are attacking me, and the neighbors will come.'" He shrugged. "Then she gets angry because, during the act, I do not bother to take my *cigarro* out of my mouth. So, as I depart, she screams anyway. For that I spend two years in *la cărcel.* But, you know, in our Mexican jails we enjoy conjugal privileges, and our Mexican girls who visit are much superior to any of your antiquated widows."

When I reported these things to the Reverend Advisor, he ran a hand through his white mane and muttered, "Can it be? Have these aged Americans turned as criminal as their peers in the States, only less publicly? Are they taking cowardly advantage of their residence in a foreign country to blame their abominations on their hapless hosts? Well, there's one way to find out."

The next day, on Castanet Row, Pete Gleet dropped all pretense of being the naive greenhorn eager to learn the ropes. He said to his new cronies, "You've told me all the ways to cheat on Medicare. Now" — he winked broadly — "how about letting me in on the real goodies?" At first, the old Mexico hands were as chary of him as the Mexicans had at first been of me. But after he had spent the whole day winking like a spastic and whispering like a stage prompter, "Where's the action at?" he evidently won their trust. For, that night at the Feliz, he instructed me:

"Make yourself scarce tomor-

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row, my boy. You are under-age, you know, by local gringo standards, and with you tailing me I might not get anywhere. I must do this on my own, if I am to verify those lurid stories of yours."

So the following day I stayed well away from Castanet Row. I tramped the mountains around the town, meditating on what those woeful Mexicans had told me and occasionally dipping into my ever-present Bible to re-read the story of David "old and stricken in years" and the "fair damsel" whose charms failed to rekindle his fires. But I got so absorbed in the narrative that I kept walking into fearsome cactus thickets. I went back to the hotel and occupied myself with a tweezers, painfully plucking out the cactus spines I had collected. That night, though I waited up until the small hours, Rev. Gleet had still not come back when I finally fell asleep. In the meantime, however, I had had a visitor: the gardener I had earlier interviewed.

"Señor," he said pleadingly. "Things get worse. Today my master and the other old gringo from next door, plus a whole company of other *viejos,* both male and female, came to tell me to re-do the garden I tend. I am to uproot all the *rosales* and *lirios* and *clavelles* and replant the whole garden in *adormideras.*"

I looked up *adormideras* in my pocket Spanish dictionary and said, "Well, poppies are pretty flowers. Why do you object? Are you allergic to them?"

"Senor," and he wrung his calloused, earth-stained hands. "My master's garden is the most vast in San Miguel de Atayde — two hectares — and a high wall conceals it from the view of passersby, and overhanging trees conceal it from any possible *helicópteros* which might patrol overhead."

"What?"

"Señor, these *viejos* want me to plant two hectares of poppies. They plan to extract from the flowers their *opio* and to transport that to the Estados Unidos disguised as their deceased spouses in crematory urns!"

I looked up *opio.*

"Opium!" I said to the red-eyed Rev. Gleet, when he finally came downstairs to breakfast at noon. "Now the old rogues are going into the heavy narcotics trade!"

He winced and said, "Please, not so loud."

I glanced warily around at the other diners in the room, leaned across the table and whispered, "They have ordered one of their gardeners —"

"Don't whisper so loud. It hurts my head. Anyway, I know all about it. I was there. Just let me handle everything, Mobey."

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After he had made a light breakfast of several glasses of something called margarita juice, he was less brusque and confided to me almost jovially: "Mobey, my lad, the situation here is even more peculiar than that in the States. Up yonder, the old folks are trying to enliven their old age. Down here, they are *defying* old age. I don't yet know just how, but I shall keep digging. You must not queer the caper — I mean, you just keep on keeping quiet and making yourself scarce. I will explain all when I know all."

Something about Rev. Gleet's demeanor seemed subtly changed and this vaguely disturbed me, but I did as I was bidden. I spent that day pretending to be a simple-minded tourist: seeing the sights of the town, buying small overpriced souvenirs and being short-changed, eating grease-fried *enchiladas* from a street vendor's cart. Then, while I was ambling through the Parroquia church — and sneering inwardly at the ignorant Catholics' graven images — I was suddenly doubled over by an agonizing cramp.

If I could have forced out the words, I think I might have apologized aloud for sneering. (However, I learned later that I had not suffered an idol's curse but an affliction common to simple-minded tourists in Mexico. Monty Python's Revenge, I think it is called, but I don't know why.) Anyway, I bolted for my hotel and barely made the bathroom in time. After an indescribable hour there, I tottered downstairs — drained to flaccidity — to seek a glass of milk of magnesia in the dining room. On my way across the lobby, I was intercepted by another visitor, this time the annually abused little housemaid.

"Señor," she said piteously. "Things get even worse."

"This is April, not January," I groaned, as she followed me into the dining room. "In God's name" — this to the waiter — "some milk of magnesia, *rapido.*"

"April, sí," said the wretched girl. "Now I am being assaulted in April, too, although I am already three months *embarazada.*"

"But," I said with an effort, "isn't your mistress at home now to keep her old goat of a husband in hand?"

"It was not my *patrón* as heretofore," she said. "It was another old goat I never saw in Atayde before. A white-haired friend he brought home." The waiter fetched a glass of chalky liquid and I took an incautiously hearty gulp. "I was offered to this friend as one might offer a *cigarro.*"

I exploded. I mean to say, the chalky liquid came up faster than it had gone down, spraying all over my front, the maid and the waiter. "What under Heaven," I demand-

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ed, when I could speak, "was that vile and venomous stuff?"

"What you ordered, señor," he said, mopping at the dicky of his uniform, "but very difficult to milk from our old mule. She is called Magnesio because she is gray-white, the color of that metal. Incidentally, señor, how did you know that?"

"Never mind. Go away," I said weakly. "Señorita, you too must excuse me. I am not feeling at all well."

"How do you gringos think I feel?" she asked, with some asperity.

"Yes, yes," I said, sliding toward the door. "I promise you these atrocities will soon cease. A gentleman much wiser than I — *ugh!* — I really must run!" And I took the stairs three at a time.

Rev. Gleet, when he again arrived at the hotel, had to talk to me through the closed door of my bathroom, and I was really too near death to reply in more than whimpers.

"Extraordinary, these old reprobates here," he said cheerfully. "Steeped in crime and sin, of course, but extraordinary in their vim and vigor. Could it be the Mexican climate? The compliant Mexican morality? These grease-fried *enchiladas?*"

"Whimper."

"They certainly do not idle away their leisure playing shuffleboard. Nor are they content to succumb supinely to old age. They refuse to go gentle into that good night."

"Whimper."

"They believe youth is wasted on the young. They are seeking some means to tap a measure of that vitality for themselves. Mind you, my boy, I am not *encouraging* their senile fantasies. But you — and our mutual SoPrim superiors — will appreciate that I must pretend to play along until I have plumbed the depths of their dissolution. To fight the Devil, it is necessary to know the Devil's wiles."

"Whimper." Even in my misery, I had the uneasy feeling that the Reverend Advisor on Aging Gracefully was most unSoPrimly *enjoying* his researchers into the Devil's wiles.

I was confined to my bed — when I was not in the bathroom — for the whole of the next day and into the night. When I heard Rev. Gleet come humming and doing a sort of dance step as he passed my door on his way to his room, I realized that I had not taken a morsel of nourishment for some thirty-six hours, and even felt a yearning for a little something. Fortunately, Mexicans are late diners, so the dining room would still be open. I got up and got dressed and again, depending heavily on the banister,

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went downstairs.

At my usual table, waiting for me, sat that same housemaid, this time with all her seven children in attendance. Her lovely dark eyes snapped with anger as she commanded, "Look at them, señor!"

I looked. There seemed nothing remarkable about them except that they were all girls and all had identically un-Mexican waxy complexions. I couldn't think of anything to say except, "Well, uh, their parentage is, uh, apparent."

"They are not pale-faced because of that!" she said impatiently. "Things have got even more worse, señor."

"What now?" I sighed wearily.

"Your order, of course, señor," said the waiter, standing a prudent distance away.

"One scrambled egg and a coffee. Now tell me all about it."

"There is little to tell about the egg, señor."

"Not you. The señorita here."

"I mean to say, señor, it is late and the larder is depleted. We have no egg. May I recommend the grease-fried *enchiladas?*"

"Oolp!" I barely suppressed another eruption and said, "Just the cup of coffee, please."

"When I finished work this evening," said the servant girl, "and left the domicile of my *patrón,* that white-haired *viejo verde* was waiting outside the gate. The same one who had already yesterday—"

"Yes, yes."

"He made noises of contrition — or so they sounded; he speaks only Gringo — and handed me a big bouquet of blue poppies. Then he helped me into a waiting taxi. It was the first time I have ever not had to walk home from work. I thought the *viejo* was trying to apologize for his earlier grossness. He kept making soft words and indicating that I should sniff the pretty flowers. Which I did, wondering if I ought to forgive him. After all, no great harm had been done. Even I, for all my fecundity, cannot get *embarazada* on top of *embarazada* . . ."

"Please, what is this leading up to?"

"Your coffee, senor," said the waiter, handing it to me gingerly at arm's length.

"I was sniffing the flowers, señor, when suddenly I knew no more. I was *inconsciente!*"

I choked on my coffee. The girl dodged and the waiter fled. "Inconscious!" I exclaimed. "I mean unconscious. The poppies!"

She shrugged. "I recall nothing of arriving at my poor home, nor of what occurred there. But when I awoke in my bed beside my *ninas,* I was again entirely undressed and again I had been—"

"Er, yes. But are you sure it was

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the same *viejo?* He would seem a rather vigorous old goat. I mean, twice in two days."

"Not a goat, señor, a *vampiro!*" she said in a sepulchral voice. "Alas, poor San Miguel de Atayde! It was not enough that we should be inundated with old gringos. Our best park benches usurped for their perpetual roost. Poor servant girls like me repeatedly ravished. Our men seduced by their painted old women. Thefts and robberies and dope smugglings blamed on us. Now these gringos have introduced something Mexico has hitherto known only from the cinema — the *vampiro!*"

I looked it up in my pocket dictionary, then laughed indulgently. "A superstition, señorita. See, it says here, 'a mythical creature which ...'."

"You spoke of his vigor," she interrupted vehemently. "I will show you where he gets his vigor!"

She held out the pallid babe in her arms and spread the collar of the nightgown it wore. On the infant's unnaturally white neck were two unnaturally bright red marks an inch and half apart.

"Horrors," I said. "Bedbugs. Tell you what you do. You get some kerosene and slosh it all over your bedsprings . . ."

"My bed does not have springs," she said through clenched teeth. "Nor bugs. With a *vampiro* haunting the house, who needs bugs? Look at the other children. Not only little Maria Concepcion here, but also Maria Asuncion, Maria Trinidad, Maria Santisima ..."

I looked, and it was so. Each of the seven *ninas* bore the same two red marks, an inch and a half apart, in the same place at the side of her throat.

"Youth is wasted on the young," I remembered, and, *"Tap a measure of that vitality ..."*

"Wait here," I said to the now-weeping housemaid, and went upstairs again to my room to get my pocket flashlight and my pocket ruler, and to remove my shoes. Then I crept into the hall, to Rev. Gleet's door, where I laid my ear to the panel. He was snoring; sleeping the deep sleep of the deeply sated. Mexican locks are unreliable; it required only a little jiggling of my own key to open his door. I padded silently inside and, shielding the flashlight's glow, moved toward his bed. In contrast to his snowy hair, his face seemed even more ruddy than I remembered it — and fleshier and plumper, even with his dentures removed for the night.

The teeth reposed in their glass of Polident on the bedside table. I fished out the upper plate and measured and distance between the incisors: exactly an inch and a half.

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I examined those two teeth more closely and discerned that they had been pierced; a pinhole was visible in the point of each one, and the holes evidently extended up into the pink plastic gums. A hot needle, I suppose, could have been used to burn the holes through the bakelite or whatever false teeth are made of. Then I discovered that the denture's plastic palate had been removed and a flexible rubber membrane substituted. With that remodeled upper plate in place, Rev. Gleet had only to waggle his tongue up and down against the roof of his mouth; the membrane would act as a miniature vacuum pump sucking through the pierced incisors. I dropped the grisly object into my pocket and went back downstairs.

"Come with me," I said to the girl. "The *policia* might not believe either one of us alone."

Well, Department, you know the rest of the story. Our denunciation was corroborated by the testimony of the gardener and taxi driver I'd interviewed earlier, and by scores of other Mexicans. The police rounded up "Pete Gleet" and every other elderly gringo in Atayde — which is to say practically the entire foreign colony — and they are all currently confined in the Guanajuato State Penitentiary on charges ranging from narcotics cultivation to senile dementia.

(It is a bit strange, but nice, to see the Atayde Mexicans enjoying their own morning sunshine on their own park benches on what used to be Castanet Row. For that matter, the whole town has acquired a new air of openness and serenity. The narrow streets are no longer clogged with the gringos' hearse-sized station wagons and bus-sized campers in which they were wont to drive even to the post office to collect their pension checks. Gentle little burros tread the cobblestones instead. The Mexicans' traditional and handsome native costumes have replaced the Dayglo golf caps, loud Hawaiian shirts, garish Bermuda shorts and pale spindleshanks of the gringos.)

And I only am escaped alone to tell thee. Had it not been for the intercession of that friendly housemaid (María María), I myself might have been included in the wholesale roundup. She was not only my rescuer, she has been my mainstay during all the uproar of the arrests and hearings and recriminations hurled back and forth. (In court, the defendants consistently and contemptuously referred to me as The Fink.) María María has been a comforter to me, and I think the SoPrim Headquarters Comptroller will not cavil at my having shown my gratitude by spending some of my expense

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money to buy the poor girl a set of springs for her rumpsprung bed.

I had expected that, for the sake of Mexican-American amity, the criminals would suffer only a figurative slap on the wrist, then be deported back across the border for their landsmen to deal with (or endure). But the prosecuting Ministerio Público told me icily:

"Mexican law may have its fallibilities, but it regards a crime as a crime. Whether it is committed by some darling little moppet, or by some hairy student claiming rightful rebellion against the Establishment, or by some old lady who looks as kindly as Mother Goose, we do not consider that crime justifiable or excusable or *cute.* Your soft and lax American judiciary may be persuaded that a machine-gun wielding Patty Hearst is a mixed-up little girl, or that a John Mitchell is an absent-minded but cuddly old teddy bear. We say anyone who can commit a crime can suffer retribution for it."

I could not budge him. Not that I cared a whit what happened to the rest of Atayde's revolting retirees, but I had hoped to spirit Rev. Gleet back to the safety and sanity of the States, in the expectation that SoPrim's rehabilitation resources could turn him from his wicked ways. I might have managed to bail him out, but only if I had revealed to the authorities his true identity and credentials — and I was loath to drag the lofty name of SoPrim into the press coverage of this low scandal. So was Rev. Gleet, I am happy to say; it may manifest *some* remorse on his part. He went off to the penitentiary as plain Pete Gleet, Prisoner No. 21554.

In summation, I hardly need point out that this mission to Mexico provided no new insight

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into that old-codger crime wave which is beginning to ravage the United States. If anything, all indications are that even worse is in store for America — vampirism, for example. Whatever is the cause of the epidemic, I know only that it infected poor, weak Rev. Gleet with a vengeance. I did not — and certainly he did not — discover down here any spiritual serum or vaccine to cure the malady Stateside. (Unless, if I may meekly suggest it, America takes heed of what the Mexican Ministerio Público said to me.)

One last remark. All the condemned gringos here, including your Reverend Advisor on Aging Gracefully, have one remaining legal recourse. Mexico and the United States recently ratified a reciprocal arrangement whereby the citizens of one country being held in the other's jails can be exchanged, to serve out their sentences behind the more familiar bars of their respective homelands (or, in the States anyway, probably to have those sentences commuted and themselves set free).

When I visited Rev. Gleet in his cell — to return his upper plate — I urged him to take advantage of that easy escape hatch. He grinned at me, baring those pointed incisors, and resolutely refused any such reprieve. It pains me, Department, to tell you why. I could fib and say that he feels duty-bound to suffer his punishment and atone for his misdeeds. But I must be honest. In that Mexican prison, you see, he enjoys the traditional Mexican "conjugal privileges" and — now that he has got his teeth back — God only knows what others.

Sincerely, if shudderingly,

— Crispin Mobey —

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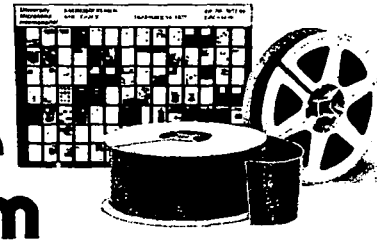

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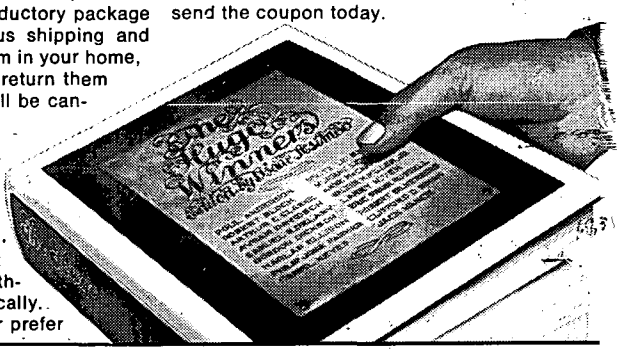

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